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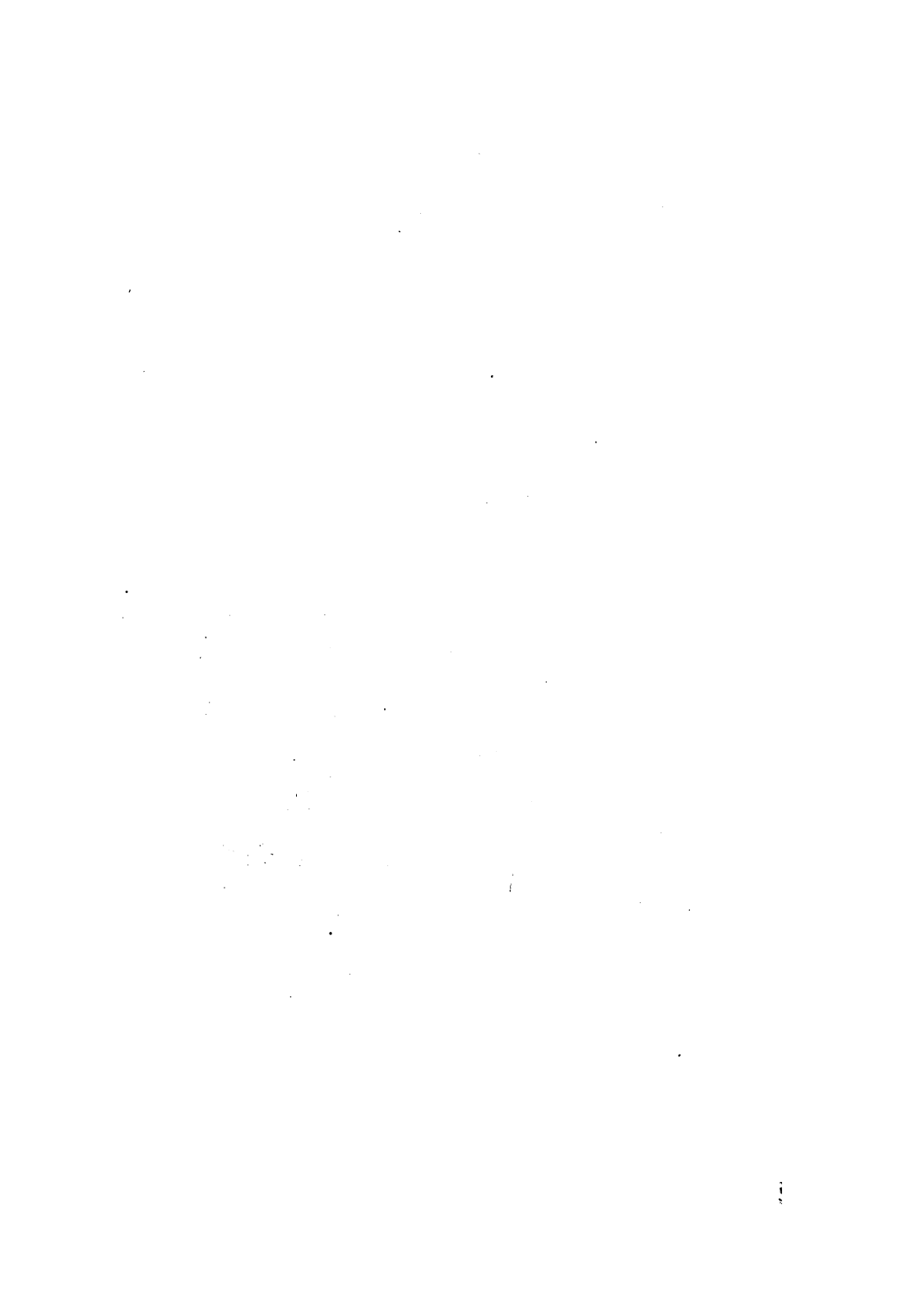
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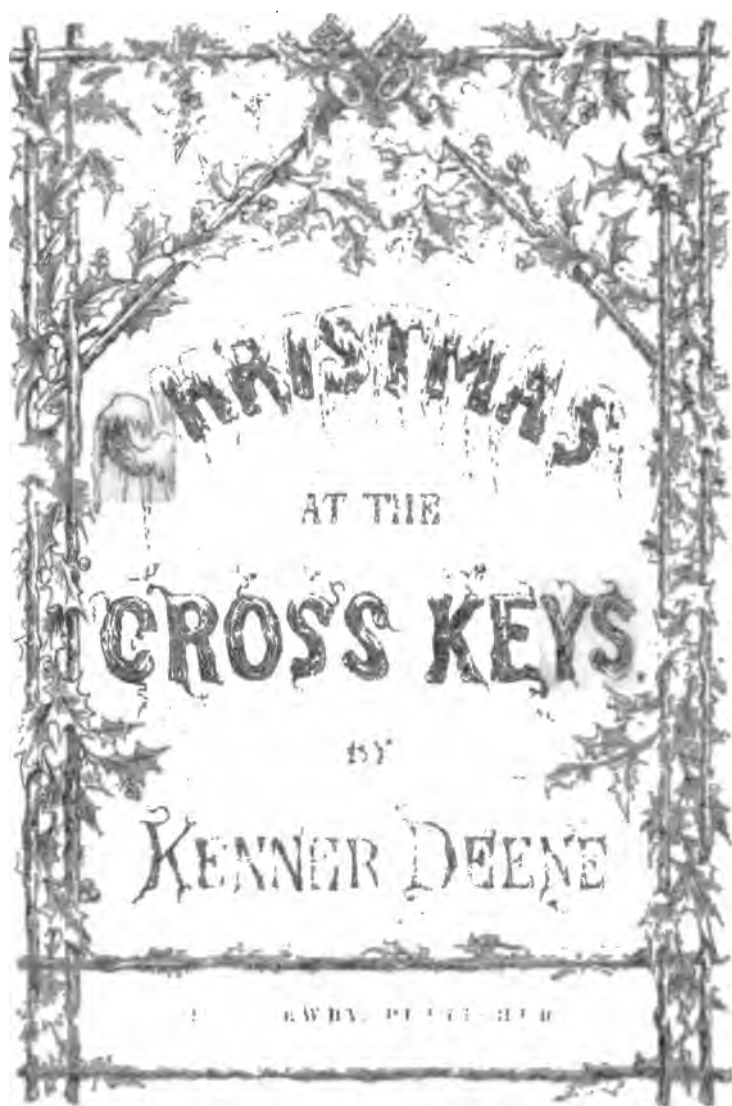
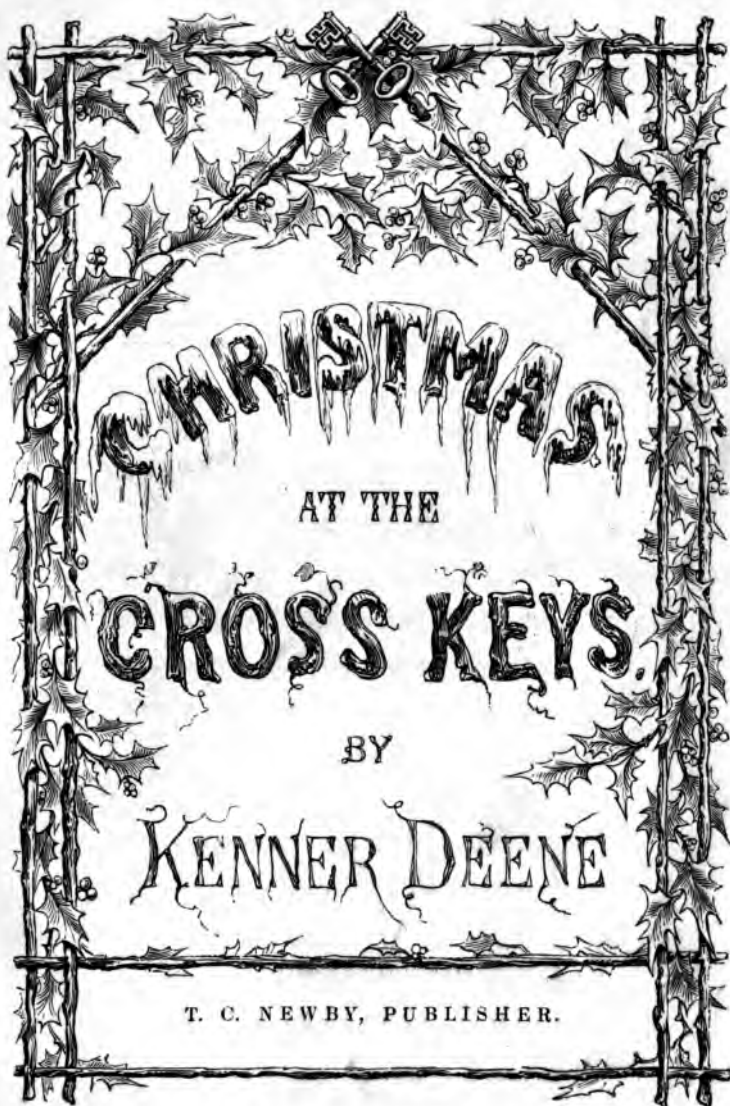




Fig. 10.10

The figure is shown in a dark, patterned robe, kneeling in a gesture of prayer or contemplation. The background is dark and indistinct, suggesting an interior setting.





CHRISTMAS

AT

THE CROSS KEYS.

A TALE.

BY KENNER DEENE,

Author of "THE DULL STONE HOUSE."

London:

T. CAUTLEY NEWBY, PUBLISHER,

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1863.

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# CHRISTMAS AT THE CROSS KEYS.

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## CHAPTER I.

### IN THE BAR.

“AND it’s that slippery,” said Mrs. Toppleton, “that I can’t so much as get out to the pump and the wash-house.”

Mr. Toppleton took his pipe from between his lips and glanced towards the street door, at which his wife was standing.

“Sit down and don’t fuss,” said Mr. Toppleton, and then he put his pipe in his mouth again, and smoked on in silence.

"I'm amost afraid as she can't come. No horse can get over this yere *hice*."

"Let be—let be," said Mr. Toppleton, taking his pipe from his mouth again; "what a worritand a bother you women do 'alus make. I never goed a journey yet but what the women was the very deuce on the road, they're 'alus a catching a man by the arm in the rail carriages and asking what station they are to stop at, and making believe as they're past the right one; and a crying out as they've lost their luggage or summit. There never was a woman yet with a head on her shoulders."

I suppose Mr. Toppleton spoke allegorically, and meant to convey that there never yet existed an individual of the feminine gender who could be supposed to stand possessed of any degree of mental capacity; for so far as the mere having of a head in the abstract went, Mrs. Toppleton was not behind her neighbours, for she owned a good sized cranium, ornamented with smooth bands

of sandy hair, and a smart cap trimmed with magenta ribbons.

She was a tidy, housewifely body also, with neither too much nor too little crinoline, a warm plaid dress and a black silk apron. Her face was fair, and her eyes were soft, amiable blue, with, soothe to say, not much mind looking through them, but quite enough to suit her purpose as landlady of "The Cross Keys," which was the name of her husband's inn.

The beds at "The Cross Keys" were clean and soft, and the sheets fine. If you asked for a chop there, it was certain to come up deliciously browned and juicy, and with the most delicate flavour possible. The ale was sparkling, and good as that described by Boniface ; and as for the comforts of the "bar," I only wish, respected reader, that you could get a chance to smoke your pipe (if your tastes are plebeian), or your cheroot (if they are refined), in that cosy bar of a snowy winter's night.

As for John Toppleton's round rosy face, it was enough to warm a man to look at, not to speak of the leaping, roaring, gleaming, glorious fire that always was the chief attraction of the place.

At the time I write of, however, there were no customers in the bar, it was just half-past three, and the dullest time of the day for business, so the landlord and his wife had no listeners to their little discussion.

Mrs. Toppleton came in from the front door looking very anxious, and she began to prepare tea and to cut bread for making toast, but she did not seem as though her heart was in the work.

"Only one day and then Christmas!" said Mrs. Toppleton, sighing.

"Well, do you want the time lengthened? Shall us ask the parson if he can't put it off a little longer?"

"What stuff you do talk, Mr. Toppleton," said his wife testily, "any body might think you hadn't got a bit of feeling."

Mr. Toppleton laughed until he was nearly black in the face, and then, as his tea was ready for him, he sipped it, and clapped his wife on the back.

By this time Mrs. Toppleton's good temper was restored, she buttered the toast and handed it to Mr. Toppleton.

"It's such a thing not to have Rose at home to Christmas," said Mrs. Toppleton.

"Bless the woman, ain't the maid written to say she'll be here by then?"

"But it's that slippery," repeated Mrs. Toppleton, "that I can't get out to the pump; it's fourteen miles from St. John's here."

"Fourteen humbugs," said Mr. Toppleton, "set your mind easy, the maid 'ull come."

Mrs. Toppleton sighed, and began to eat a piece of toast.

In this very matter-of-fact world of ours, it is surprising how one has to come and sit down to meals, no matter what inward chafing the spirit is undergoing; we must eat, I sup-

pose. I only wish I could quote the lines of Mr. Owen Meredith on this subject; but I cannot, and I have not got his *Lucille* beside me—his *Lucille*, which he is accused, by unkind critics, of having borrowed from the French of George Sand. At any rate, those lines on the utter impossibility of our doing without our dinners, must be his own, and very true they are—so I think, at least; and though poor Mrs. Toppleton had never heard in her life of *Lucille*, George Sand, or the poet alluded to above, she quite came into his opinion, with regard to the necessity of dining, or, at least, of *tearing*, for she eat another piece of toast, and sighed, poured out another cup of tea, and sighed again, and finally she rose from her chair, and went out into the passage, and called loudly:—

“Johnnie, Tom, Ettie, come down to tea, my dears.”

These were the little Toppletons, the young olive branches of the Toppleton tree, who

were playing in a room above the Bar, which was fitted up for their accommodation, with a safety guard round the fire, and bars before the windows. (Mrs. Toppleton was a good mother), so the little Toppletons came down to tea.

Johnnie was a sharp, inquiring lad of eleven, much fonder of talking to grown-up people about things with which he had no concern, than of looking after his wee sister and brother. He had a fresh, countrified complexion, brown eyes and hair, and a soiled collar, twisted crookedly, and out of place; his fingers were dirty, as what boy's are not, generally speaking? he was small and slight of his age, and had a great predilection for jam and pastry, and a very decided conviction that he was a personage of no small importance, and one whose opinion ought to be taken in all matters of interest; so Johnnie put his boy's rough, not over clean, fingers into the family pie, whenever the family pie



was being discussed. He had just come home for his holidays.

Tommie was only five; he was a regular spoiled urchin, fat and round, with blue eyes, and curly hair, a great admiration for his elder brother's sayings and doings, and a great propensity for roaring and bawling; in fact Tommie was the great drawback to the comforts of The Cross Keys, for there was no part of the little inn where his stentorian voice did not make itself to be heard, whenever his wrath was aroused, which it very often was. Tommie had one amiable weakness—it was in favour of butter. Whenever the maternal eye was averted for an instant, if there happened to be any butter within his reach, Tommie Toppleton contrived to convey it to his mouth; his little dirty fat fingers went to work and made sad havoc in the butter cooler, and strange to say, no matter how much he contrived to tuck away under his little brown-holland pinner (as it is the fashion to call the

article referred to in the midland counties), Tommie Toppleton was never the least sick, or ill, or bilious. He was a marvel, that boy at the butter—something quite astounding.

“Now, Tommie, here’s a nice piece of toast mammy’s cut for you,” said Mrs. Toppleton, putting a good size slice on Tommie’s plate, “eat it up, good boy.”

“I want some butter, Mammy,” said Tommie, stoutly extending his chubby hands. Mrs. Toppleton hurriedly cut a piece off the fresh, clean looking half-pound, and put it on Tommie’s plate.

Mr. Toppleton was, at the moment, buried in the pages of the County News, and unmindful of the pernicious system of spoiling, which was going on under his very nose; so Tommie ate his butter, and then telegraphed to his mother for more.

Ettie, the youngest Toppleton, was a wee black-eyed baby of two years, as yet able to do little in the way of talking, and walking,

but much in the way of eating, sleeping and crying.

She copied Tommie, as religiously as Tommie copied Johnnie, and venerated him deeply in her baby-way.

"I want butter," said Tommie, again presently.

"I 'ont a butter," said Ettie, in humble imitation.

So that foolish, spoiling mother, Mrs. Toppleton (who, of course, you know, reader, was making one of the sharpest possible rods for her own back, by the way in which she went on with those children) Mrs. Toppleton actually cut another piece of butter; just then Mr. Toppleton who had come to a long word in the paper, the meaning of which puzzled him, put it down and scratched his head; and his fatherly eye fell with an abstracted gaze on Tommie and the butter, who popped it into his mouth, and Mr. Toppleton observed—

"I can't make out the use of these yere long words, it spoils all a man's pleasure in reading the papers, it's nonsense, to my thinking."

"Let me see, father?" said Johnnie Toppleton, jumping off his chair and running round to the back of his father's. "I'll tell you in a minute."

"So Mr. Toppleton showed the paper to Johnnie, and Johnnie began to spell out the word c o n c o n, t a m i c o n t a m i, n a t e n a t e, c o n t a m i n a t e," cried Johnnie triumphantly.

"An wot does it mean, Johnnie?" asked Mrs. Toppleton.

Now Johnnie did not know the least what it meant; had he been older and wiser, perhaps he might have arrived at the sense by reading the foregoing sentence, but Johnnie satisfied himself by giving a guess at the signification.

"It means something like thinking and being by yourself." Johnnie was thinking of

contemplate; it satisfied his father, who went on reading with an increased veneration for learning.

"Mother," said Johnnie, "what makes your face looks so queer? You've got tears in your eyes."

"I wish," said Mrs. Toppleton, who was washing up the tea things, "I wish you'd look after baby, she's toddled out to the street door on her blessed little legs, and she'll be after Tommie out in the snow in a minnit."

Of all determinedly self-willed boys, Johnnie was the worst.

"Why have you got tears in your eyes, Mother?" asked he again, coming round to the fire, and rubbing his hands before the blaze. "Is it about Rose?"

"Of course it is," said Mrs. Toppleton sharply, "here's weather as no horse can come through. Rose won't be here till after Christmas."

"Why does Rose stay away in London?"

"Of course she earns money there," said Mrs. Toppleton.

"Yes, but I've heard you say you pay Miss Downe, the bar-maid, half as much as Rose gets in London. Now it would be a deal better to have Rose home, I hate Miss Downe."

"You've no right to hate anybody, Johnnie Toppleton," said Mrs. Toppleton. "It's wicked; and so Mr. Evans, the vicar, told us yesterday in church, you know, 'Love one another,' says he," and Mrs. Toppleton emptied the leaves out of the tea pot into a plate, which she put into the cupboard against the morrow's sweeping, and she rubbed the tea pot inside and out until it shone again.

"I know somebody as you don't love," remarked Johnnie slyly, "Mrs. Clyde at 'The Chase,' you don't love she." Occasionally Johnnie forgot his grammar, which had improved, on the whole, since his residence at the school of Mr. Flicker, at Birmingham, where he was boarder.

"You don't love she," said Johnnie, forgetting Mr. Flicker, and Lindley Murray.

"You'd best mind your little sister, and not talk about what you don't understand," said Mrs. Toppleton, angrily. "Hearken, there's the blessed lamb a crying," and Mrs. Toppleton rushed to the front door, and returned holding the baby in her arms. The child had followed Tommie into the street, and had fallen on her little nose in the snow.

She was dreadfully frightened, and the mother sat down in a chair before the fire, and tried to hush and soothe the little one.

"There, there, never mind, never mind, pretty art, pretty art, pretty lamb," remarked Mrs. Toppleton, affectionately rocking the wee thing to and fro in her arms. "It's your fault, you great idle chattering lad," and the mother made an attempt to box Johnnie's ears, but Johnnie ducked under the table, and came up unhurt on the other side, quite out of his mother's reach.

"I ont gout again," observed the baby,

raising her now cured nose from her mother's shoulder, "I out gout Tommie again."

"But baby will fall and hurt her blessed precious face again. No; baby shall have a nice piece of cake, and go up stairs with Tommie and Johnnie, until Ann comes to put you all to bed."

Ann was the handmaid of the "Cross Keys," she was general cleaner, nurse to the little ones, and errand girl generally. How Ann contrived to get thro' the immense amount of work she did, and still maintain her stout rosy looks, was a mystery, to me insolvable.

Mrs Toppleton rose, and took from the cupboard a very nice looking plum cake, already cut. The baby went almost frantic with joy at the sight, and Johnnie went to the street door, and hallo'd to Tommie to come and partake thereof. So each child had a good square piece of rich cake awarded to it, by way of making the buttered toast sit easily on



their stomachs perhaps, by that rod manufacturing mother, Mrs. Toppleton; and then they all went upstairs to the nursery, leaving their mother to tidy up the bar, and prepare for customers.

## CHAPTER II.

### CUSTOMERS.

"'Tis in Bolton Hall, and the clock strikes one,  
And the roast meat's brown, and the boiled meat's done."

Do I misquote, oh, reader? I have the jingle of one of the Ingoldsby legends in my ear; so, forgive me. I have nothing to do with Bolton Hall or clocks striking one, not I. I am only going to tell you some more about the "bar" of John Toppleton's inn, so, if you please, I wish to observe, 'twas in the "Cross Keys," when the clock struck ten, that the "bar" was full, that the fumes of tobacco were wafted fragrantly? (if you are a

smoker you would think so) or disagreeably? (if you are a lady of refinement you would think so) across the room.

Peace reigns in the "Cross Keys." Tommie and baby sleep softly in their cribs aloft. Johnnie is standing by the fire, listening to the talk of his elders, and occasionally saying his say. Miss Downe, the barmaid, is gone home to spend Christmas, so Mrs. Toppleton has double duty to perform. She is very busy, and so is Ann, turning taps, and brewing punch, and drawing glasses of ale. I am not going to apologise to my more exalted readers for intruding this plain, common, every-day family upon their notice. Mrs. Toppleton, drawing ale, and making a glass of punch for the fat, rosy organist there in the corner, is a good creature in her way, ignorant if you like, vulgar of course, but still a woman, an English woman, with a mother's heart beating warmly under her plaid dress, and with all a wife's love and duty beaming

out of her simple blue eyes; respectable, venerable, then, as an English wife and mother, is good Mrs. Toppleton; so all honour to her, albeit she does not speak good English and cannot pen a decent letter.

The "Cross Keys" is the chief inn in the little town of Ashton, in one of the midland counties, not a hundred miles from Birmingham, not fifty, not twenty perhaps, but I shall not tell you what county. Ashton has 'one street, one church, one chapel, one tidy inn, two bakers' shops, one draper's; it is after all little more than a village, picturesque enough in its way, with cow sheds near the street, farms close round, fields, and woody lanes and orchards, and all now lying buried in a robe of spotless snow, and the wind whistled shrilly about the gable-ended roof of the "Cross Keys," but inside the "bar" the fire glared grandly up the wide chimney. The customers talked and smoked, and now I'll give you a sketch of the customers, and I'll begin with the organist.

He was a very large man, young, that is somewhere about two and thirty, not very tall, with what Mr. Dickens calls "a precocious stomach," the filling of which with goodly viands formed one of the most important objects of his life. He liked good eating, that Ashton organist, he liked good drinking, and good firing, and good bedding and carpeting, and all good creature comforts. I don't think he was a very good creature, he was too fond of himself for that. If any body was ever impressed with a lively sense of his own importance, "it was that man;" his name was Banks. It is rumoured amongst the Ashford legends, that when first the rosy face of Banks shone on the inhabitants of that town, a certain young fellow with a dash of mischief in his organization accosted the complacent organist on this wise, "Can you tell me, sir, if number eleven is to let?"

"I really don't know," returned Banks pompously and haughtily, "I am a stranger here,"—(which meant, I suppose, I am alto-

gether superior to your town and its number eleven, I come from London), but his questioner, counterfeiting a mawkish look of surprise, replied :

“Why, I thought—I thought, all the street belonged to you.”

A vulgar little tale, reader, but towns—country towns—abound in vulgar little tales, and so if you are too exquisite to listen to a few common place details, please to put the book away. I warn you that it is a very common-place book, but if you will have the good nature to follow me, I will try and amuse you to the best of my poor ability.

Banks's face was handsome, a white forehead, bright rosy cheeks, blue eyes, chestnut hair, a well formed mouth and chin, a fair moustache, and he played the organ in St. Mark's Church sweetly, his voluntaries were really touching. I can't think where that eating, drinking, smoking, boasting man of flesh and blood managed to get the pathos

and the poetry, which went forth from his fat fingers when he pressed down the notes of that organ.

I suppose (now, reader, I am not forcing my rambling opinions on you. I am only soliloquising, and supposing as I go along, and everybody is at liberty to enjoy his own thoughts, and even to write them down if he have a mind) I suppose, then, that most of us have a portion of sentiment and romance somewhere hidden in our souls, and Banks certainly had his share, or he could never have made the organ in St. Mark's speak as he made it speak on Sundays, when the folks were flocking out of church. But how that man did boast !

I assure you, reader, that when he first came to Ashton he informed some of the respectable inhabitants that there being no house good enough for him in the place he should build a nice one, and he thought of buying horses too, because horse exercise was necessary for

him; and yet he lodged complacently for twelve months over the baker's shop, and his income as organist was forty pounds a year, with which, unlike Goldsmith's good country clergyman, he did not pass for rich even in humble Ashton.

Poor Banks! but you shall hear him speak for himself presently. His father was, I believe, a well-to-do tradesman in London, and J. F. Banks, Professor of Music, as the brass plate on the baker's private door styled him—J. F. Banks, Professor of Music, must have drawn pretty largely on the paternal purse during the first year of his residence at Ashton, for he had but little teaching, and it is certain he denied himself no good thing in the way of eating, drinking, or fine clothes. He spent lots of money at the "Cross Keys," he rejoiced in coarse jokes and *double entendres*, and with it all, will you believe it? was a vast favourite with the ladies—some of the ladies, that is.



At the time of which I write, the charms of J. F. Bank's rosy face had captivated the heart of a young widow with two thousand pounds. A widow who had always ranked up to that time among the *élite* of Ashton, and been on visiting terms with the Clydes, of "the Chase," the great people of the neighbourhood; but setting aside rank and position, the widow gave herself and her two thousand pounds to J. F. Banks, Professor of Music, who thereupon did remove from his lodgings over the baker's and established himself in the Square, the aristocratic portion of Ashton.

It was a real square, of two storied houses looking into a real flower garden.

Somebody furnished the house grandly, perhaps the paternal Banks. The brass plate was placed genteely on the door in the Square, and J. F. Banks continued to give music lessons, and to make the organ speak on Sundays.

The *élite* of Ashton cut Mrs. Banks, and

Mr. Banks waxed more important than ever. His bow to the tradespeople and mediocre of Ashton was the very acme of condescending superiority; he grew more and more portly, but he did not visit the 'Cross Keys' so frequently. Now, however, just before Christmas, he came in to smoke, to drink, and to chuckle over his own jokes as of yore. Poor Banks, I don't like him much, reader, and I'm perhaps a little spiteful, but I try to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, about these real personages of my story, I do, upon my honour.

"A glass of whiskey, please," said Mr. Banks, who had already had more than one; so Mrs. Toppleton made him a glass of whiskey.

Opposite to Mr. Banks sat little old Mr. Timms, such a queer little man, such a rich little man, the richest man in Ashton, the most respected because the richest. He had large manufactories in Birmingham, half the

houses in Ashton belonged to him. The "Cross Keys" belonged to him. He lived in a large house, magnificently furnished: he had six daughters not very pretty, not at all pretty to tell the truth.

Rumour lied not, when she asserted that little Mr. Timms could give each of his daughters ten thousand pounds the day they married. None of them were married, respected as Mr. Timms was. Somehow there was a prejudice against the plebeian blood of the rich Misses Timms, who were not at all pretty, among the sons of the county families in the neighbourhood, and the Misses Timms would not have married a tradesman or a manufacturer for the world, so as the gentlemen would not marry the Misses Timms, and the Misses Timms wouldn't marry the tradesmen, they remained the Misses Timms. If ever there was a hard, dried, withered, business-like little fellow, it was Timms. I wish you could have seen the way he wore his hat

at the back of his head, and walked along the High Street of Ashton, guiltless of gloves, with his little sharp nose elevated in the air, as though he was trying to ascertain the rate of interest in the higher regions. He loved money, he did not think over well of those that had none: he was not a bad sort of little man after all. He always called everybody sir, or, ma'am, when he talked to them, it was a way he had.

"Good whiskey that," said Banks, putting down his glass, and stretching his fat hand towards the fire.

"Yes, sir," said rich little Timms; "very good; but I find it bilious, sir."

Banks nodded his head assentingly, everybody nodded assentingly when little Timms spoke.

"I've drunk whiskey at eight shillings the bottle in London," said Banks pompously.

"Indeed, sir," said little Timms, sipping his brandy and looking incredulous.

"I think it must a been very good whiskey, at that price," said John Toppleton, closing one eye and looking knowing.

"And I've drunk claret every day at a guinea a bottle," continued Banks, slowly leaning back in his chair. Mr. Banks was a customer, so John Toppleton didn't pretend to doubt him again, and everybody else in the Cross Keys swallowed the organist's claret at a guinea a bottle.

Just then two young men rushed into the bar; two young men with knapsacks, covered with snow were these young men, from their fur travelling caps down to their Wellingtons; they laughed at everything; at the storm, at the cold, and each other; they shook the snow off their clothes; they called for cigars and punch; they established themselves in cosy nooks by the fire; they seemed to entertain a scarcely veiled contempt for the steady going customers in Toppleton's bar.

No doubt they voted the whole set fogies

and slow, for most young Englishmen, even if well born, indulge sometimes in slang; they took leave to doubt some bragging assertions of J. F. Banks. I think it was something about the immense rate his father paid for income tax.

"A nice kind of father to have I should think," said the taller stranger, "I wish I had him."

"Yes," said Banks, slowly, and without taking offence; he was either obtuse, or a coward. "Yes; a very tidy old fellow."

The taller stranger laughed, and showed his white, even teeth.

"Any more punch? but indeed I could eat some supper presently, couldn't you, Jack?" to his comrade.

Jack assented; so they ordered pork chops and potatoes, and the invaluable Ann went off to the kitchen to cook them.

Now, I will try and sketch the two light hearted strangers. To begin with the taller,

he was about the middle height, well knit, though slight, more muscle than flesh about him, broad across the shoulders. Any man versed in the noble art of self-defence could have read at a glance that the youth in question was a tolerable adept in the same; he was a fine animal, strong, and well grown, with a handsome head, well set on his shoulders, curly brown hair—not long, but lying close and picturesquely to his small head; a brow sufficiently open—nothing extravagantly so, but still with no trace of meanness, or narrowness in its formation; hazle eyes, bright with fun and mischief; a straight nose, a handsome mouth, with short upper lip, disclosing perfect teeth whenever he spoke or smiled. A complexion naturally pale and clear, but browned by the sun, and foreign travel; a silky brown moustache, and a general expression of good tempered pleasantry completes his portrait. I doubt not, though, that those fun loving eyes could

sparkle with rage on slight provocation; there was a haughty determination struggling under the outer guise of pleasantry; the age of this young man might have been six and twenty.

The shorter stranger was a year or two younger than his companion; good looking, small, and lightly made; quieter than his friend, but subject to bursts of uncontrollable laughter. Evidently they were both in that heyday of youth when the amusement of the hour was the chief object of life—young men whose future was laid out for them, who had only to sit down and enjoy the feast that fortune had spread for them. They were of those who take no thought for the morrow, but let the morrow take thought for itself.

After all, are not these the wisest people? Do they not spare themselves much pain, much thought?

Themselves, aye; but is it only of ourselves



that we should think, reader, in this weary world?

“The chops is ready,” said Ann, appearing at the door, so the young men went out from the other customers to eat their supper in the little parlour.

## CHAPTER III.

ROSE.

*"On n'est malheureux que par sa faute,"* writes Madame de Maintenon. She is partly right. Most of us can trace our misfortunes to our faults, our follies, our oversights, our weaknesses. Alas! If we could only be gifted with real worldly wisdom, real prudence, foresight, self-possession, calmness, judgment: but what machines we should become! passionless, loveless—perhaps even unpitying, and hard. He who has no capacity for suffering, can have, me

thinks, but little for happiness in its truest sense.

Rose Toppleton, the humbly born heroine of these pages, was twenty-two at the time we write of. She had not lived at home for six years. Except at Christmas time, and then only in compliance with her mother's urgent pleading, she never entered Ashton. Then she always came back, helped to make the Christmas pudding, and to deck the house with holly; washed and dressed, and fondled her little brothers and sisters, dined with her parents, laughed and joked with her father, stayed a few days, had one fit of weeping on her mother's shoulder, (when no other eye beheld her weakness;) and then she would go off again to London, where she was teacher in a school, at Clapham, and received forty pounds a year salary. And how had Rose, the child of ignorant parents, received such an education? Ah! but Rose was a rare creature, she was indeed, reader, even from a child; hers

was the nature replete with deep, passionate earnestness, the true poet's soul, the ecstatic worship of the beautiful, the shrinking from all that was coarse, or hard, or mean, or harsh, or selfish. Faults she had, I grant; faults, which sprang from that too great warmth, that too ready faith in others, that unwillingness to doubt, or disbelieve, that measuring of worldlings by her own pure standard; faults she had, I grant, which sprang from these causes. If Rose would only have loved me as she loved somebody, unworthy of the priceless treasure of her affection, I could, I think, have died for her. Yes! but then only think what an insignificant personage I am getting into a rhapsody about! John Toppleton's daughter, at the "Cross Keys!" Don't you fancy, reader, I must, as the phrase goes, be very hard put to it for a heroine, that I have chosen such a person? I'm not, I give you mine honour. I could have taken that sweet simpering Miss Clyde, from "The Chase,"

who has blue blood in her veins, who is slight, and tall, and pretty, and refined; who has passed a season in London, who was educated on the continent, and who rides thro' Ashton on her milk white steed, in her graceful habit, and with her drooping feather and golden hair falling down her shoulders; but I take slight interest in Miss Clyde, you shall see her presently, but I repeat that Rose is my heroine.

Six years before, when Rose was sixteen, she was the loveliest, sweetest maiden in the county. She had been to school of course, and even then Rose had learned to speak and write grammatically, and to play touchingly on the organ, and piano. She was always a great reader, a thoughtful, serious, tender souled creature, full of what we call sentiment, but which a dear and gifted friend of mine distinguishes from sentimentality, which last is a *flimsy* ridiculous imitation of the first; Rose was full of a serious

sentiment then, not of a kind which unfitted her for her plain every day duties: she performed these cheerfully, and well; and then she did more, she would steal away to her room with a book of poems, or history, of which last she was passionately fond, and she would read for hours, and then think for hours, but don't imagine that she left her own or her brother's stockings unmended. She was a treasure of a daughter to her doting mother, whose complete idol she was, and deserved to be; everybody liked, and respected Rose. Nobody was ever rude, or free, to her, even in the bar. There was an atmosphere of purity about her fair young form, which prevented the least approach to impertinence; not that she was stern, or commanding, or repulsive, for she had nothing to repel. She had not many lovers, young men in her own class, who admired her beauty, and esteemed her worth, scarce thought of associating Rose Toppleton with their ideas of a wife; they instinctively felt her superiority,

and the gossips used to say, 'Rose was cut out to be the wife of a gentlemen.' Did these foolish speeches have any weight with Rose? I cannot say; perhaps they had in a manner, perhaps she hardly knew herself.

One day, Mrs. Clyde, of "The Chase," called at the "Cross Keys," to inquire the character of a servant, the predecessor of the invaluable Ann; her carriage and footmen were waiting at the door. Mrs. Toppleton asked the lady into the little parlour, and there Rose was at work, and Mrs. Clyde asked casually if Rose would come up to "The Chase," to help her deck up their ball room for a grand rout. She wanted hands, she said; somebody with taste, and she had heard that Miss Toppleton had been very dexterous, the last Christmas, at the dressing up of the Town Hall, for the county ball. Would Miss Toppleton come up to "The Chase" the next day—and Miss Toppleton agreed to go.

She saw in Mrs. Clyde a dark lady, not

handsome or young, or amiable; proud, and distant, polite and freezing, but Mrs. Clyde wanted her to go, and the next morning Rose went.

\* \* \* \*

Up to the Chase one bright May morning when the dew was spangling the young grass in the park, and the tangled green boughs in the shrubbery shook down bright drops of water on her bonnie brown hair as she passed, and the brilliant sun was dazzling in the blue heavens, and the old walls of Clyde Chase half clothed in ivy, seemed to smile upon her, so she thought, as Rose went on with her heart full of love, and beauty, and hope, and youth, sunny youth, that golden time of the *teens* was hers, her own. And she went on joyously until her little foot tripped against the gnarled stump of a tree, and she stumbled, but did not fall; a hand passed round her

1



waist, and drew her up steadily to her feet, he had been following her—that young sportsman, with the nut brown curly hair, and stalwart frame. His bright frank eyes looked into her own, and he asked her kindly, while he laid his gun aside, “if she was hurt?”

And Rose said,—what did she say on that bright May morning long ago!

We all remember such a morning when we seemed to tread on ether, and the atmosphere was loaded with fragrance, and our souls looked through our young eyes, and love had scarcely warmed into passion, but was only trying his wings for a first flight into Elysium. Nonsense, and trash, and rubbish! Aye! but you who score these pretty words against this page so cleverly, and feel better after you have done so, you have felt the same. You may be, doubtless you are, a very wise man now, but you have been a fool, if not, I have no sympathy with you; is not that an humble confession?

Rose knew that the handsome young gentleman at her side was Alexander Clyde, familiarly known as Alick. She had occasionally seen him at church, and in the Cross Keys.

He removed his arm from her waist, and walked by her side respectfully, and they talked together.

Alick was not a libertine or a villain: had he been I doubt me much if he could have succeeded in touching Rose's pure childlike heart at all. His nature was joyous, frank, and pleasure seeking, rather affectionate, roving, careless, honourable, far from intellectual, or refined, but he loved Rose in his way, he admired her blooming cheeks, and soft brown eyes, and rosy mouth. Of her higher qualities, he knew nothing; they talked together

*"Easy things to understand."*

Rose used to meet him often afterwards in her walks; she thought by accident, perhaps he

thought so too. She did not awaken for some time to the consciousness of her equivocal position; she dreamt not of the shadow of evil; and Alick respected her as tenderly as though she had been a duchess. She did not know she loved him, she never dreamed he loved her.

“Love took up the glass of time, and held it in his glowing hands;  
Every moment lightly shaken, ran itself in golden sands.”

Then came the awakening, the starting into intensest life of uncontrollable, agonising passion, and Rose found, as a great writer has expressed it, that she had planted a tree deep into her life, and that now all her happiness was torn up by its roots, for she loved Alick Clyde; with all her pure imagination, and warm passionate heart and self sacrificing spirit she loved him, she would have died for him. It was so hard to part, to be scorned, to be upbraided by Mrs. Clyde; and Alick himself, cruellest of all, could part from her so

easily; saw it all in such a different light when his mother talked to him sensibly, almost laughed at it; six weeks after he was so thankful that he had done nothing wrong, took leave of Rose kindly and pleasantly, shook hands with John Toppleton, and confessed he had been foolish to walk and talk with Rose so much, and then he joined his regiment and went out to the Mauritius, and Rose wished to die; happiness seemed to have passed out of her young life for ever. Every body praised her prudence, while her heart was breaking, and then she fell dangerously ill. She recovered, but she was pale, and changed and silent, and fretful.

Again, do not most of us know something of this stage of the old world malady I am writing about?

Johnnie's noise disturbed her terribly; it annoyed her to be interrupted in the reveries of Alick, even by her mother's loving voice, she answered snappishly, she waxed sulky,

and self-willed ; her father marvelled much at the change in his sweet tempered Rose. Who can measure the depths of her young heart's desolation at this time. All the more bitter because it was a thing to conceal, to crush, to put aside completely from her outer life, while it eat into the very core of her inmost being.

One day poor Rose fell upon her mother's neck, and with her hot and tearless eyes averted, she begged that she might go away ; it was more than she could bear, she passionately averred, to remain at Ashton. Mrs. Toppleton was frightened at the girl's desperate earnestness ; her " little host of maxims," her motherly love and tenderness, even fell powerless on the young creature, whose highly strung organisation made her quiver in every fibre of her frame, while she listened to, argued, and pleaded with her mother.

" He is away, now," said Mrs. Toppleton ;  
" he will not be back for years."

"But the woods and the lanes are here, where we used to walk, and the people are here who used to see us together, and the church where he used to watch me all the Sunday service through, and the organ is there, mother, and the same tunes swell out of it that used to come so sweetly when I watched his beautiful face above his mother's and sister's in the aisle; and his mother is here—cruel, proud Mrs. Clyde, who spoke such dreadful words to us when she met us walking in the wood, and who turned my Alick's love away from me."

"If it had been the right sort of love," said Mrs. Toppleton, shortly, "she could not have turned it away; he is not worthy of you, Rose, put him out of your thoughts. Law, why when I was young, and your age, there was a draper's assistant, just such another as young Mr. Clyde to look at, brown hair, and tall, and smart, and I was engaged to him a little while, until I found he was given to drinking,

and wasn't constant like!! my word!!! I put him out of my thoughts at once and wouldn't have nothink to do with him, and then I met Mr. Toppleton."

"Mother," said Rose, on whose ears this little reminiscence of the draper's assistant fell unheeded, "let me go to London?"

"Is the girl mad!" cried Mrs. Toppleton.

"No, mother, but I want to go to school again, some school as pupil teacher, where I shan't have much to pay, and where I can learn much. Mother, I want to learn a great deal."

"What for, child? Goodness alive!"

"That morning that we met Mrs. Clyde in the wood, mother, when she stopped us, and spoke such cruel words that made my face hot with shame, do you know she asked Alick, scornfully, what sort of a girl I should be to introduce as a wife to his friends? For you know at first he was in a rage, and told me to hold up my head, and told his mother that I

was as good and as clever as she was, and oh! mother, she burst into such disdainful, bitter laughter, and she said, 'Alick are you taken in by a girl whose vulgarity is glossed over by a provincial boarding school education, and whose head is turned by reading penny romances. For shame, for shame! Alick; where is your spirit?' And, mother, Alick blushed, and looked ashamed—ashamed of me! and I felt so low, and ignorant, and weak beside that proud, clever, worldly woman. I vowed in myself that I would learn as much as she has learned. I have the power. Oh, mother, let me go away, and learn languages, and let me read, read, read, all wise thoughts of wise men, that have been printed into books these hundreds of years; as my heart is starving without love, let me feed my mind with learning." "I will do it," she added, gloomily, and in a low tone; "if you don't help me. I must go without help," but the next instant she was weeping loving tears upon her



mother's heart, begging her to forgive her ill-humour, her selfishness, her folly ; but pleading in piteous accents that she was so very wretched, that she was scarce accountable for her actions.

And now you have seen Rose in her weakness, reader ; and you will come to the conclusion that she was a young person utterly wanting in dutiful feeling towards her parents, wanting in pride, in maidenly dignity, that she had not a well-poised mind, that she knew nothing of self-scourging duty, in fact that she is not fit for a heroine. Wise mammas, who read this, will plume themselves upon the fact that their dear Carys or Amelias would have acted differently. Just consider though, dear madam, that little Rose Toppleton had a weak, narrow-minded, affectionate, spoiling mother ; that she had never had the great advantages which your Cary and Amelia enjoy ; that though her code of principles was excellent, and her notions of right and

wrong were pretty clear, still that she could not at that young time of passion distinguish so accurately as she was able to do afterwards, between her duty to her parents and her duty to herself. She was blinded, too, by suffering. Perhaps I am only making awkward excuses after all for Rose Toppleton, who, with her faults, just as she is, is inexpressibly dear to me. Enough then; Rose was wilful, and headstrong, and wanting in dignity. I know that is what the severest will say of her; and the end of it was, that she carried her point with her parents.

She entered as pupil teacher into a school in London; there she continued two years; after that an opportunity offered, which she immediately embraced, of entering a school in Paris, and she lived for three years in the Allée des Arbres, Champs Elysées, under the auspices of a certain Madame Dauphorée, who had there a Pensionnat des Demoiselles, and Rose learned languages and music, and

taught her own to the foreigners. She came back afterwards to London, and she had been French teacher at Miss Scribe's school, at Clapham, for eighteen months at the time we now write of, when Mrs. Toppleton was so much afraid that the slippery roads would prevent her coming home to Christmas.

During all these years of absence Rose has been doing what she threatened to do when she was sixteen and wilful; she has been studying languages, and she has read, read, read all wise thoughts of wise men that have been printed into books these hundreds of years.

## CHAPTER IV.

## CHATTERING.

AND the two young strangers came again into the "bar," and called for more cigars, and began to chaff the customers, not offensively; but only so as to promote merriment. They had just come from New Zealand, and they had lots to tell about pig hunting, and the taller one vaunted that he could walk thirty miles a day, and carry his swag; whereupon Mr. Timms begged to be informed what a swag meant.

To him replied the elder stranger, that it

consisted of the cold boiled heads and arms of native children, the usual food of Europeans in that Colony.

Mr. Timms looked horrified first, then offended, and finally, with a frank roar of laughter, the young gentlemen condescended to explain that it meant the usual compliment of blankets, and provisions required for one person.

Then the conversation fell on thieves, and pickpockets, and the taller stranger volunteered to tell a tale about a certain scampish personage from whom he declared, Albert Smith, had drawn his Jack Johnson in the adventures of Mr. Ledbury.

"We'll call him Jackson," said the stranger, "my uncle knew him well. He had run through all his property; he was a gentleman you know, a fine handsome fellow, didn't care a scrap for any person breathing; would have no more minded asking the Lord Mayor, or Mr. Gladstone, or Lord John Rus-

sel himself 'if their mothers knew they were out,' than he would have minded running up a bill at his tailor's, or thrashing a cabman. Well, he was horribly put to it you know, 'didn't know where to turn, so he put his gold watch in pawn at Hatton's in the Strand, and how do you think, sir?" addressing the portly organist, "how do you think he managed to get it out again?"

"Broke into the house perhaps," said Banks contemptuously.

"Not a bit of it, too wise for that, he went the next night at a quarter to one, and kicked up a tremendous row at the hall door, just as Mr. Hatton was enjoying a delightful nap; he got out of bed, and asked who was there? and what they wanted? when Jackson stepping out into the street, answered politely, 'ten thousand pardons, Mr. Hatton, I am so inconvenienced by the temporary loss of my watch, *would* you have the very great kindness to inform me what o'clock it is?' This

trick Jackson repeated several nights, always awakening Hatton out of a sound sleep, and overwhelming him with excuses, and apologies, and polite excuses; at last Hatton could stand it no longer, so he sent Jackson a message, saying he wanted to speak to him. Jackson went, and Mr. Hatton calling him aside, said in a confidential whisper, 'Mr. Jackson here's your watch, pray let me hear no more about it.' "

"How much of that are we expected to believe?" sneered the organist.

"Precisely as much as you feel inclined," returned the taller stranger coolly.

"None of it then," said Mr. Banks, loftily.

The stranger nodded his head carelessly, lighted a cigar, and began to smoke away pleasantly.

"I'm pretty sure I've read that somewhere," said Dr. Roskin, a bald, rough, good natured surgeon at Ashton, with a very short memory, and very long legs; "I think

I've read it in the very book you were alluding to!" the younger stranger inclined his head, not ungracefully.

"Most probably, sir."

"You seemed to tell the tale on your own authority," remarked Banks, who had conceived a distaste for the off-hand stranger, and whose courage was warmed by John Toppleton's whiskey.

"Did I?" There was no disarming the cool impertinence of that young man, and at last, Banks got up, nodded haughtily to the company, and walked out.

"What an agreeable gentleman that is," remarked the taller stranger, addressing Mr. Timms.

"He's the organist at St. Mark's," said Mr. Timms.

"Indeed, he has more the cut of a methodist preacher, fat, and sleek, and pompous. Only that he has a moustache, I could have sworn he was a labourer in some Ashton vineyard, some ranter at some little



Zion Chapel ; he seems so precious fond of whiskey too, are you sure he's never been a preacher ?”

Mrs. Toppleton turned round, ire in her eye, reproof on her tongue.

“ I never can abide, and I never will abide, to hear religion made game of, sir, in this here bar. I'm not against a bit of innocent fun, but when you come to mockery, and blasphemy, it frightens me to hear it. It's all very well while you are well and hearty to speak lightly, but when you comes to be ill, it's another thing altogether ; then you'll alter your tone, so please not to talk no more of that, in this here bar.”

The shorter stranger laughed inmoderately within himself ; the taller one puffed out wreaths of smoke and said nothing.

John Toppleton threw some coals on the fire, and Johnnie Toppleton, looking with his undaunted boy's face into the countenance of the elder stranger, inquired : “ Are all methodist preachers fond of whiskey ?”

"Yes, my lad ; on a moderate computation they consume four times the quantity imbibed by other members of the community."

"What does that mean?"

"What?"

"Why, those long words you spoke."

"Oh, it means that parsons generally are fond of strong drink, and mind you think of that the next time you say your catechism."

"Is our parson fond of whiskey, mother?" inquired Johnnie.

"Come, you just come along to bed," said Mrs. Toppleton (who did not like the tone of the stranger's remarks), and she laid no gentle hand on Johnnie's shoulder. "You just come off to bed, this here bar's no place for you ; you sit up too late, my boy ; I'll teach you to speak against our parson," and she swung Johnnie out of the room in a tremendous rage for her, and he appeared no more that night.

When Mrs. Toppleton came again into the

bar, the strangers asked her if they could be accommodated with beds for the night, so she soon ushered them upstairs to her neat little dormitories, or bed-rooms, I had better write, if I attend to that excellent advice in the *Cornhill*, which recommends the using of plain words; and then she came again into the bar. Her husband was talking very earnestly to Mr. Timms and Doctor Roskin.

“And all I knows is, as if hever a family ’ad need to count their costs and look sharp, it’s them Clydes. Why, the Chase is just mortgaged to its full value; the squire has been a terrible extravagant man in his time. This ’ouse belonged to him, Mr. Timms, before he sold it to you. Why, he’ve just sold everythink.”

“And if so be as their pride was to be broke, it ’ud be a good thing for um,” observed Mrs. Toppleton, obviously forgetting the recommendation of Mr. Evans, the clergyman, to love one’s enemies, which maxim she had impressed upon Johnnie during tea.

"She's a devil of a proud woman, that Mrs. Clyde," said Doctor Roskin, taking his pipe from his mouth (he was a common-minded man, and smoked clay pipes); "I'm not over fond of her."

"What a sad thing the death of the eldest son was," observed little Mr. Timms, gravely, "drowned off the harbour of Rio Janeiro, when the ship Columbine went down; every soul on board perished; that's fifteen years ago now."

"I'll be bound," broke in Mrs. Toppleton, "as 'twas his step-mother's cruelty as drove him to wild courses, and made him go to sea; she wanted him dead, always, that she might have the estate for her son."

"You 'avent got no right to say no such thing," said Mr. Toppleton; "Bessie, you've no right to say as the woman wanted the young chap dead; say what you've a right to say, but don't say that."

"Well, I know that a more miserable

looking lad than he was I never seed; he wasn't much above nineteen when he left home."

"I always thought him a fine lad," said Mr. Timms.

"Yeller hair," said Mrs. Toppleton.

"Light hair," answered Mr. Timms, "and a beautiful complexion, but so overgrown, and thin, and awkward, and shy. The people thought hereabouts he was a fool, he never would associate with the fine folks who visited at the Chase, and he ran away from Eton, and went to sea in the Columbine, and was drowned off Rio Janeiro."

Little Mr. Timms no longer seemed the dried, hard, business man, when he spoke of the death of Alick Clyde's half-brother: there was a tender chord somewhere in his nature which the dead youth had somehow caused to vibrate, and while he spoke of him a husk came in his voice, and a twinkle in his eye, something like a tear. He sipped

his brandy, however, leaned back in his chair, and became himself again.

Soon, after a little more chattering, the guests at the "Cross Keys" dropped out one by one, the fire had burnt low in the grate, the landlord bolted the door, the landlady and Ann rinsed out the glasses, and then all the household went to rest.

## CHAPTER V.

## THE NEXT MORNING.

It was sunny and freezing, with heaps of snow by the road side, and even the middle of the street was spotless as yet as a king's mantle. Few were astir, but the Toppleton breakfast was over, and the young Toppletons were scampering about in the nursery up-stairs, while Mrs. Toppleton washed up the tea things, and Mr. Toppleton busied himself in various ways.

Presently there entered the door of the Cross Keys a complete stranger, and one

of peculiar appearance, so that Mrs. Toppleton paused in her washing of the cups, and stared at him more than good taste or good manners allowed.

He came in coolly, and merely observed in a gruff voice:

"It's a cold morning; can I have some breakfast?"

"Oh yes, sir," said Mrs. Toppleton, "please to walk into the little parlour;" so the stranger walked into the little parlour, and as there was a fire there he sat down before it, and slowly drew off his boots, and then from his carpet bag, which he carried with him, he pulled out a pair of carpet slippers; these he thrust upon his feet, and then he put his feet up one by one to the fire, and warmed them, while he stood on the hearth rug, and seemed to take an inventory of the cheap furniture in the little inn's best parlour; the Kidderminster carpet, the moreen curtains, the china dogs on the mantelpiece, the mahogany table,



the little sideboard, the horsehair sofa and chairs; then when Mrs. Toppleton brought in the nice table cloth, and metal tea pot, and plate of hot cakes, he stared at Mrs. Toppleton.

"What will you take for breakfast, Sir?"

"A beef steak, if it's tender."

"Well, sir, the girl shall run down to the butcher's, and get one, as tender as a chicken?"

"Thank you," said the stranger, drily, "I want my breakfast. I've walked a very long way. I left St. John's at six this cold dark morning, now it is nine; I've walked fourteen miles in the snow, and pretty nearly all in the dark."

"You know the country, sir?"

"No! I could not miss it: it is quite a straight road." The stranger had a voice of peculiar harshness, unpleasant in the extreme. When his breakfast was ready, he sat down to it and eat like one half famished.

He was a tall old man, with bushy iron grey hair, whiskers, and beard; he had piercing determined grey eyes of peculiar brightness, his hair was very long, and fell in masses over his forehead, and what with that and the exuberant growth of his whiskers, he had a strange and somewhat fierce appearance; albeit his cheek was ruddy and clear, as though his health was good. He stooped very much, but his frame was muscular and sinewy, his hands were coarse grained, and covered with freckles; his dress was an overcoat trimmed with fur, cloth breeches, and corderoy gaiters; all had the gloss of newness on them, and his linen, though coarse, was white. He looked like a pretty well-to-do farmer, only that his accent, though harsh, was still that of a man of education. In short, he puzzled Mrs. Toppleton with his carpet slippers and corderoy gaiters, and she stared at him tremendously.

“Do you think you’ve ever seen me be-

fore?" he asked her suddenly, coming to a pause in his meal.

"No, sir! that I'm sure I've not;" on which he burst out into a loud fit of laughter.

"I thought perhaps you'd been out in Sydney, and the colonies. That's where I've spent the most of my time?"

"Oh! Lord," broke out Mrs. Toppleton.

"No! I'm not a returned convict," said the stranger, helping himself to a thick piece of bread, and laying it well over with butter, "I'm not a returned convict, I'm a very respectable man, and my name is Middleton?"

"Middleton, sir?"

"Yes, that's a good enough name, isn't it?"

"Oh! yes, yes, sir; I'm sure it is."

"Of course you are; you wouldn't be fit for a landlady if you were frightened at a rough old grey beard, who has made his fortune out in Australia. I'm come home to

look out for a wife. Have you a daughter, ma'am ?”

“ Yes, sir, I hope she'll be home to Christmas, but I'm afraid of the hicc; she's in a situation in London ; she knows French and German, and plays the organ, and she's read a'most every book as ever was printed.”

“ Then she won't do for me,” said Mr. Middleton, grimly, “ I hate your fine ladies ; if she'd been more in your style, she'd have suited me better. I like a young woman to bake, and wash, and cook, and sew, and throw learning to the dogs.”

“ You're a precious deal too old, sir, for my daughter,” said Mrs. Toppleton, whose anger was roused by Mr. Middleton's rudeness. “ Rose is only twenty-two.”

“ And I'm fifty-two,” said Mr. Middleton, drily ; “ I don't call myself old at all, perhaps your girl may have a chance of me, if she's pretty ; I'm rather fond of pretty women.”

“ She's beautiful !” said the mother, trium-

phantly; "but I don't think as ever Rose will marry."

"Has she been crossed in love?" asked Middleton, roughly, and then without giving Mrs. Toppleton time to answer, he added, "because if she has, she won't do for me. I don't like second loves."

Mrs. Toppleton went out with the stranger's breakfast things, muttering to herself "an ill-mannered old fellow, perhaps though, he's better than he seems. Those as is smooth at first going off often turns up a dreadful rough side afterwards. Money too. Lots of money he said he had." Mrs. Toppleton, ma'am how much of the hidden worth which you attribute to the grey bearded stranger, do you unconsciously award to him on the score of his riches. I am afraid, I am very much afraid, that it is pretty nearly all to be traced to that conviction in your mind. How we poor mortals do grovel, and humble ourselves to Mammon; the few, the rare few, who do not,

where are they to be found? Reader, they are the wretched dupes, believe me, of the rest of mankind; the sister who gives away her all to her selfish spent-thrift brother, what reward has she in that? She did not bow down to worship the golden image, that is set up in these realms, but generously spurning the God of Gold left herself bare and poverty-stricken. She has no reward, she has a dreadful punishment, she must go through the burning fiery furnace. She is to be found among the sad sisterhood of toiling old maids, working on as a teacher or a companion for a paltry pittance, without a home, without a real friend, with no love from any human creature to cheer and warm her chilled existence. She must learn, as the phrase goes, to look at life as it really is. Away with fancies and dreams, and hopes for her! Life has nothing sweeter for her, than the consciousness of rectitude, and if she be of gentle loving nature, the privilege of trying to

help and comfort others as far as she can. A sweet doctrine that, the utter abnegation of self, but not a natural one, easy to preach, difficult to practise. But those who are the most self indulgent, are always the most ready to preach it to others. Look at the toiling, starving curate, who has scorned Mammon by marrying for love, and passed the Golden God, without bowing himself, must he go through the fiery furnace too? Oh, yes, he must, Mammon is more cruel than Molock! The curate's children want shoes, and the curate's wife is dying for want of wine and jellies, and he cannot give them to her; he labours until his back is bent, and his hair grey, and he is almost brought to a piece of bread. Life is to him very real indeed. Away with sentiment and beauty, and even, I fear me, with hope in his case; he did not worship the Golden God, and he must suffer! Mrs. Toppleton did worship it. She would not have been the landlady of the snug 'Cross

Keys' had she not known how to do homage to the Golden Idol. "He means well, no doubt, though he's a disagreeable fellow, and he has plenty of money."

Presently, the two jocund young strangers of the evening before, came noiselessly down the stairs in their carpet slippers, and astonished Mrs. Toppleton by a sudden entrance into the Bar, and an eager demand for breakfast, and she ushered them into the little parlour, where the rough old Middleton was smoking his meerschaum by the fire. He fixed his piercing eyes on the handsome face of the taller stranger for a moment, and then taking his pipe out of his mouth, said shortly :—

"Morning, morning!"

"Morning," retorted the young man, flinging himself easily into a chair, and scanning with a waggish smile, the peculiar exterior of Middleton. "It's very cold."

"Not so cold as in Canada," said Middleton.



"You have travelled then?"

"A little," said Middleton, carelessly, "and so have you I suppose?"

"Yes, I've been about a bit. Do you like Canada?"

"No."

Middleton went on smoking determinately, after speaking that monosyllable, and then Mrs. Toppleton brought in breakfast, and the two young men sat down to it, and began to eat with appetite; evidently they considered old Middleton a fair target for their fun; they talked about French perukes, and county crops, in allusion, doubtless, to the bluff man's unkempt hair, and they looked at his gaiters and carpet slippers, until they were nearly convulsed with smothered laughter.

"Are you a gentleman?" asked Middleton, at length sharply. He had been, apparently, half-dozing over the fire for the last ten minutes, and he opened his eyes and fixed them upon the taller stranger, who was lean-

ing over to peer curiously into Middleton's carpet bag, which lay near him.

The young man flushed hotly, and answered haughtily—

“Certainly, I am.”

“Behave like one then,” said Middleton, getting up and removing his bag.

“If you reproach me for looking into your bag, why the plague do you leave it open under my nose? you know well I am only larking.”

“Pride wounded,” said old Middleton, laughing hoarsely, “Very well, young chap, I do believe you are a gentleman, but you carry your waggery too far; some men now would have pitched you out of the window, for the riggs you’ve been carrying on here.”

“If they could,” returned the young man scornfully, extending his muscular arm.

“Ah, well,” said Middleton, rising and giving the fire a poke, “I should not be afraid for one.”

“Shouldn’t you?”

"Not a bit of it." He put his meerschaum into his pocket and sat down again, whistling in a sweet low key a peculiar air, which one would hardly have given him the credit of knowing, much less of executing. The young gentleman, feeling himself in the wrong, had nothing exactly to say, but he was considerably nettled, and conceived a strong distaste to old Middleton, his meerschaum, and his carpet bag.

Presently a loud scream from the "bar," sounded in the ears of the three men, then a man's rough tones of welcome and cries of "Rose, Rose," from Johnnie Toppleton.

The fact was, reader, Rose had actually walked from St. John's over the snowy roads; she had slept there the night before, and finding that no horse could be trusted over the ice, she had paid a man to carry a parcel for her, and to walk with her, and now she was actually in the "bar," with her doting mother and uproarious little brothers.

## CHAPTER VI.

## CLYDE CHASE.

SHE has taken off her bonnet, and she is sitting close to the fire, holding her father's hand in hers, and looking fondly, though cheerfully at her mother. Rose has no look of grief on her sweet young face ; there is nothing the least love lorn, or lackadaisical in her physique.

What then has become of the great sorrow, which drew her from her humble home? Has she forgotten it? Is it a dead love? At least it sleeps.

If any chance were now to throw her in the way of that young soldier Alick Clyde, I would not answer for Rose's peace, but hope has been dead such a very long time, and love cannot exist without hope. Still what does the French proverb say about first love? I think it is, "*revenons encore à nos premiers amours*," and the Scotch have a proverb about the ease with which old broth is warmed up again. I think, then, that if that careless rover, Alick Clyde, were to talk soft nonsense to her for half an hour, poor Rose would not look as calm as she looks now. I must describe her to you :—of middle height, and slender, but rounded and graceful, a charming figure, rather plump than otherwise, with a dress of a pretty shade of brown merino, I think the ladies call the material, fitting exquisitely to it; a white collar, and a piece of bright pink ribbon passed under it, tied into a saucy looking bow. Hair of a golden brown gathered into a net behind, and fal-

ling in waves around her white broad brow in front. Eyes brown, large, loving, honest.

"Eyes not down dropt, nor over bright, but fed  
With the clear pointed flame of chastity."

A brunette complexion, with a soft bloom on the cheek, and a small rosy mouth disclosing pearly teeth whenever she spoke; this is Rose's exterior. I feel I have not done her justice; in your opinion my description hardly reads like that of a great beauty; but I do not say that Rose was such a very great beauty; she was, to my thinking, the very impersonation of the French word '*charmante*,' and I am convinced you would have agreed with me, if you could have seen her.

Tommie climbed upon her lap, and began to pull at her ribbon with his fat fingers.

"I want a penny," he said, so Rose gave him a penny, and then Tommie ran off with it, at once to buy a ball, with which he returned, and began to play in the snow outside

the door; and he ultimately dropped it down through the cellar grating of the next neighbour, and cried so loudly in consequence, that his mother had to come down with another donation of rich cake. Weak minded Mrs. Toppleton! Rose went up to her mother's room, and brushed her hair, and washed her hands, and then she made her mother sit by her on the bed, and she said to her fondly,

“Mother, I am afraid I did very wrong ever to go from you. I had no sort of right, I think, to quarrel with the situation in life in which God had placed me. I have a home, and a loving mother, and I am not sure that I have not done wickedly in deserting you all for my own purposes. Oh, mother dear, I am never going away any more!” Such a sweet voice as Rose had, mellow, rich, musical, the very antipodes of that grating voice of Middleton's down in the inn parlour. Mrs. Toppleton pressed Rose in her arms. “That's right,” she said, “my dear, you'll be ever so

much happier at home, and I shall be so glad."

Rose's large serious eyes had an earnest, half puzzled look in them, as she spoke thus, she looked absently at the floor, and Mrs. Toppleton thought she had discovered a clue to the mystery.

"I see what it is," she said, hilariously. "You find life in boarding schools dull, and the butter's not half as good as it is in the country. You want to see more life, and you're quite right to come home."

Rose burst into a merry peal of laughter at her mother's misconception of her feelings, and the natural and affectionate way in which she put her actions down to selfish motives. Mrs. Toppleton did not know Rose, and the next moment a pang came to Rose herself when she reflected that her mother had only seen her suffering, and wilful and alas! that I should have to write it of sweet Rose, selfish. Why had the fond mother had to suffer



the pangs of absence from her loved child? because the child was too ill tempered and unhappy to remain at home. Rose turned fondly to her mother again—

“ Mother ! I am not coming home because of dullness, and bad butter. I’m coming home because it is my duty to be useful to you and the little ones, and to repay you for the love you have shewn to me.”

Now, reader, I hope Rose is partly redeemed in your eyes ; she went down at once to help her mother in the cooking ; that graceful Rose, who had read all the historians, and the poets, and who knew Madame de Maintenon’s letters by heart.

Her mother told her to step into the little parlour and ask the gentlemen there what they would like for dinner.

It happened that Mr. Middleton and the young man called Jack, were out, and the taller stranger, with the curly brown hair, and straight profile was standing whistling by

the fire. He turned round at the sound of Rose's voice, and then all the colour faded out of her face, and she nearly fell. He went up to her and took her hand courteously.

"Rose, you look charming;" the kind, frank, firm, even tones, untuned by passion, unshaken by emotion, the worldly self possessed natural tones recalled her to herself.

Alick Clyde stood before her. Alick, bronzed and changed by time and travel. The boy's smooth cheek and chin were covered by brown hair, but she knew the roguish smile, the brilliant teeth, the hazel eyes. Merry Alick, to whom she had given her love, for whom she had suffered so much, was not changed in her eyes. She returned his greeting politely, asked in a firm tone, when he had returned? Learned that he had sold out of the army, and gone with his cousin Jack to New Zealand two years before, and that he had returned only last night; his parents would be up that night from London,

he said, and then he should go on to Clyde Chase.

He looked into Rose's fair face, fairer than when he had last gazed upon it; his man's heart was stirred within him, perhaps his man's vanity was piqued at her self possession.

"Rose," he put his hand on her shoulder, stooped down, and before she was aware, he had pressed his moustached lip on her glowing changing cheek. She shrank from him whispering, "Oh! Mr. Clyde. Alick!" the last word escaped her unconsciously.

She looked reproachfully at him.

"Well, Rose, are you very angry with me? I have not seen you for six years, or seven, is it?"

"Six!" said Rose.

"Six, ah well, we are old friends, are we not? One little kiss is not too much to ask, after such a long absence; even if your mother had been looking she could not have blamed me. Do you know, Rose, not one of the

people in your bar recognised me last night, not even your father; it is my moustache and whiskers, I suppose. I went away a beardless lad; you remembered, though" — His tone was tender, as he spoke that word, his eye glistened, and he tried to possess himself of her hand.

"Rose! we are friends," he went on softly. "I heard you were away from home, or I should not have dashed in here so carelessly last night; I never saw you."

"No, I only returned this morning."

He held her hand again. Now, Rose, what a tumult of hope, and love is going on in your soul!

Alick returned; Alick holding your hand and speaking low, and looking tenderly into your eyes. Alick of age, and his own master. Oh! how you have cherished that love, unknown to yourself; how very blinded you are at this moment to all worldly prudence and resolve! I am sorry for you, Rose.

Why do you linger near, and listen to that handsome Alick Clyde ?

Rose drew her hand from his, and said she must go ; and almost immediately the sound of a man's footstep was heard in the passage, and in quitting the room she encountered Mr. Middleton. She paused.

"My mother wants to know, sir, what you would like for dinner?"

"Does she? Are you Miss Toppleton?"

"Yes."

"Oh, your mother says you know French and German, and that you are a great reader, eh?"

"What will you have for dinner?" said Rose, pleasantly, and not as though she was offended.

"Anything that's going. Irish stew, or roast chicken; whatever will give you the least trouble."

"Thank you;" and Rose went out of the room.

"That's a nice girl," remarked Middleton to Alick Clyde.

"Yes," said the other, shortly.

"Neat, and pretty, and quiet," Middleton went on. "I like that girl."

"You had better tell her so," said Alick, with a light laugh.

"I mean to."

Young Clyde did not answer: he went out into the bar, for by this time Rose had made his presence known to her parents, and he received a warm greeting from Mr. Toppleton, and a very cool one from his wife. But Alick did not care for that. He sat in the bar and smoked and chatted, and watched Rose coming and going while busied in her household offices. I hardly think his heart beat much faster on her account; he looked at her with a kindly, admiring eye; he would gladly have flirted with her again perhaps. If we could have read his inmost thoughts, we might have found that the chivalrous feel-

ing with which he had formerly regarded her was gone, for Alick was changed, from contact with men of the world. He was poor, too; his inheritance was mortgaged, and his father was in debt. He had a dread of poverty; he was of a thoroughly pleasure-seeking nature, and he had no more thought of marrying Rose Toppleton than he had of marrying Ann. Yet he liked her; he even fancied he loved her a little. He was astonished to find her so graceful and refined, but still after all she was only Rose Toppleton, you understand.

Johnnie came in, after a good game of snow-balling, and he went up to Alick Clyde at once, and wished him good morning.

"Are you married?" he inquired, after listening for a few moments to some of Alick's New Zealand stories.

"No."

"Are you going to be?"

"Yes," said Alick, winking at Rose and Mrs. Toppleton. "I'm going to marry a

black woman with two heads, from New Zealand. Will you come up to the Chase to see her after she's my wife?"

"What makes you marry an ugly thing?" asked credulous Johnnie.

"Oh, for fun!" said Alick, carelessly, beginning another cigar, and feeling tired of entertaining Johnnie.

Rose looked up; she was stoning raisins at a little table. For fun! There was much contained in those words—for fun! Alick would almost dare and do anything; her earnest nature was totally incomprehensible to young Clyde. She, who was only too serious in her resolves and actions, felt pained, she knew not why, at his light words.

"You think a great deal of fun, Mr. Clyde."

"If one does not when one is young, my dear, how can one, when one grows old?"

"Why do you call Rose, dear?" enquired Johnnie.



"Because," said Alick, "because she is dear. I'm very fond of Rose."

"Marry her then," cried Johnnie, "instead of the black woman with two heads; I should like Rose to live at 'The Chase,' and be a lady."

Alick laughed loudly at this little suggestion, and even Rose joined in.

"She would not have me, Johnnie," said Alick.

"Yes, she would, I'm sure she would. I'll ask her—what shall I say?"

"Oh tell her, Mr. Alexander Clyde requests the honor of her hand."

"Requests the hon— I cannot remember it," said Johnnie.

Just then, Mr. John Markham, first cousin of Alick, and familiarly called by him, Jack, came in.

"Hollo, Jack! come here, I must introduce you to Miss Toppleton—Mr. Jack Markham. There, you can't shake hands, because she's stoning raisins."

When Jack had greeted Rose, he turned to Alick.

"I say, old fellow, the train's come in and your father's at the station."

Young Clyde jumped to his feet, and began hurriedly to prepare for departure. He went for his overcoat, put on his boots and his fur cap, and strapped his knapsack on his back, then he went up to Mrs. Toppleton.

"I will come in again this evening, Mrs. Toppleton, and settle the bill ; there is a sovereign for the present."

"You don't owe more than a quarter of that," said Mrs. Toppleton, coldly.

"Don't I !" returned Alick, good humouredly, "well, I can come in to settle it all up to night, can't I? Keep the sovereign, Rose," and he walked up to where she stood stoning the raisins.

"Rose, I shall see you to-night, of course." And with a pleasant smile he went out. To-night, of course !

Oh! the old joy, and the old pang, the old hope, and the old doubt, the old, old love come back again, to Rose. Has she been away for nothing? Has she suffered for nothing? that the light tones of that careless young man, are still to have power to stir her being to its utmost depths. Sweet Rose, with drooped head, and large brown eyes, languid with tenderness, she is standing at a white deal table, placed in a recess of the window, and looking into the inn yard; above her head hang goodly sides of bacon, two smoke dried hams, and numerous strings of onions; the bright lids and saucepans against the white washed walls; the red roaring fire in the grate, the clean slate coloured stones of the kitchen, that opens into the bar; these are the objects amid which sweet Rose is planted. Is it too homely, too coarse a scene? Nay! but it is real: look at her white arms, and slender fingers, look at the pile of red brown raisins she has stoned, and which are heaped

upon the dish. Look at the gleam of winter sunshine, which is playing amid her brown hair, and glancing on her rich brown complexion, just where the delicate pink cheek contrasts so exquisitely with the soft brunette hue.

We must leave her now to her plain household duties, and follow Alick Clyde to Clyde Chase.

It was scarcely half a mile from the High street of Ashton, and the two cousins were soon out of the little town, and walking briskly over the hardened snow between the white hedges; they still talk cheerfully, and their joyous laughter rings merrily in the clear frosty air.

"It would be such a jolly spree to play some *trick* on that fat organist. Can't you think of something, Jack?"

Jack did think of something, though what it was we will not at present communicate to the reader; and now in a few moments they

have entered the great iron gates of Clyde Chase or Park.

An old woman who had been Alick's nurse shut it after them; she was near-sighted and deaf, and so Alick did not take the trouble to make himself known to her, and they went up under the branching elms which interlaced their boughs over their heads. Soon they came upon the Park, and within sight of the house which had been in possession of Alick's ancestors for centuries. It awakened no very sentimental emotions in his breast; for, although he had not seen it for six years, all he said when its ivy-covered walls met his eyes, was :

"If I could afford it, I'd build a billiard-room at the back; we want a billiard-room."

So they came on over the frosted sward, and soon they stood in front of the house. It was not a very large or a very fine one, but it looked picturesque and time-honoured, the very reverse, Alick declared proudly, of any-

thing cockney or new. The walks in front were well swept, and the flower-beds under the windows, although buried deep in snow, yet showed care and neatness in their outline. Alick raised the knocker, and gave a loud rat-tat-too, and a footman in green and silver livery opened the door. The moment Alick stepped into the hall, he left his rough manners on the threshold; he was always very mindful of his dignity within the walls of Clyde Chase.

"Is my father arrived, William?" he asked, calmly.

"Mr. Alick!" cried the footman, in surprise; "no, sir. Please to walk into the dining-room, sir," and they walked into an old-fashioned, oak-panelled dining parlour, with family portraits of dead Clydes in wigs, and party-coloured coats on the walls. An oak sideboard loaded with plate, a faded Turkey carpet, a long table covered with a damask table cloth, on which was laid a cold

ham and fowls, and wine decanters, as if for luncheon. A fire in the ample grate, and an oriel window with stained glass round the border, looking into the Chase. It was far from being a splendid or even a handsome room, but it looked like the dining-room of no *parvenus* or upstarts notwithstanding.

"Have you sent the carriage to the station, William?"

"Yes," broke in Jack Markham, "I saw it there, and spoke to my uncle and aunt; they are creeping over the slippery roads, I suppose."

"Somehow I feel low, Jack," observed Alick Clyde, when the footman had withdrawn, "coming home to spend Christmas, after being away for six years. One ought to feel jolly, but I don't; this house makes me feel sad."

"Take a glass of wine," suggested Jack.

Alick slowly poured himself out a glass of wine, which he drank off at once, and then he

stood with his back to the fire and whistled softly.

"Are you in love, man?" inquired Jack.

"Why no," said the other with a little vexed laugh, "unless it is with little Rose Toppleton," whereupon Jack laughed, and they both laughed.

"The fact is, Jack, my father is deucedly poor, that's the truth. My mother has been worrying my life out with business matters this last fortnight in London. I was quite glad to get off alone with you; now I shall have it again, I suppose; they want me to marry, Jack."

"Who?"

"Some Miss Broadstairs, who is on a visit at the Crofton's at Oakley. She's got thirty thousand pounds."

"Will she have you?"

"Heaven knows; but our family is a good one, and I am not a bad looking fellow; she is only a corn-chandler's daughter, they say



she is pretty. I suppose I must try and fascinate her, but I hate the thought of marriage with any woman breathing ; such a bore, such a tie ; I love complete freedom, that's why I left the army. Here's my mother."

A scuffle in the passage, a bringing in of trunks, and hat-boxes, and then Mr. and Mrs. Clyde came into the room. Alick shook hands with his father and kissed his mother, and then Mrs. Clyde sat down, and her maid took off her bonnet and travelling cloak, and brought her slippers, and the family all sat down to lunch.

Mr. Clyde was a very tall, red-faced man, of fifty-eight, or thereabouts ; he had been handsome in his youth, but intoxication had made him coarse, and swelled and altered his features (naturally fine). He seemed stupified with strong drink even now. He was a violent, self-willed, proud man, jealous of his position as a county gentleman, but so headstrong and passionate that he had long ago quarrelled

with nearly all the other families in the neighbourhood. He was dictatorial and rude at magistrates' meetings, elections, and guildhall dinners; he was fond of horseflesh and betting, and he never gave himself the least trouble about his two children, Alick and Julia. Mrs. Clyde managed for them. Now I will describe her.

She was ten years younger than her husband; a woman with a clever, dark face, a scornful mouth, and flashing black eyes; a thin, lady-like, well-behaved woman; a very rich dresser. She had quite a passion for diamonds, heavy gold ornaments, and velvet dresses. She was of French extraction. Her husband's foolish extravagance frightened her, for a certain Mr. Jarvis held his bonds for mortgages on the estate to the amount of £60,000, its full market value. To pay off part of this mortgage by the marriage of her son with the parvenue heiress, Miss Broadstairs, was now her aim; and, considering

that ruin seemed impending over the family,  
I find it hard to blame her.

Now, while the family are at luncheon, we  
will return, if you please, to the Cross Keys  
and the new customer, Mr. Middleton.

## CHAPTER VII.

## MR. MIDDLETON.

“AND if ever farms wanted a good landlord, it's them farms of Squire Clyde's, ruining for want of draining; overgrown with timber in some places so that the grass won't come up, and the birds is harboured to that degree, that the folks can't scarce get nothink out of their gardings.”

John Toppleton was sitting in the little parlour with Mr. Middleton, and giving him an account of the rents of lands, the drainings and crops of the same, the respective merits

of turnips and mangel as food for cattle, and various other topics especially uninteresting to young ladies; but Rose was sewing in the room, and apparently listening with patience to the unromantic discussion.

"Then you think, if a man had capital, and wanted to invest, that it wouldn't be a bad speculation to invest, in case these farms go to the hammer, in the purchase of one or two of them?"

"Well, no," said Mr. Toppleton, scratching his head. "The land's good land, if 'twas well done by."

"Father," Rose broke in, "I don't like to hear Mr. Clyde spoken of so. It is not kind."

"Who talked of Mr. Clyde?" said her father, roughly. "I'm only giving this gentleman an account of the farms hereabouts. We're talking of business."

Mr. Middleton looked at Rose, with a queer smile on his lip.

"Was the young man, with brown curls, and a saucy tongue, who was here this morning, young Clyde?"

Rose's eyes flashed a little.

"The gentleman you allude to is the son of Mr. Clyde," she said, proudly.

"He seems a favourite of yours, young lady, anyhow," said Middleton.

"Yes," said Rose, who felt annoyed, and she looked fearlessly at Middleton, "a great favourite of mine."

"*Il a bonheur*," said Middleton, in a voice low, soft, and unlike his own. "Your mother says you can talk French."

"*O que vous êtes moqueur*," said Rose, good-temperedly, for her anger never lasted long, and there was something, after all, that she did not dislike about Middleton.

Just then Johnnie came in to tell his father he was wanted, and Rose was left with the rough old stranger. He fixed his keen grey eyes intently on her as she sat at work.

"Are you coming to live at home for good, Miss Toppleton?"

"Yes."

"You don't seem to think me a very agreeable fellow. If I had brown curls, now, instead of grey bush, if I were straight, instead of being a stooping, work-bent old man, perhaps I should be a favourite of yours."

Rose smiled.

"I have plenty of money," Middleton went on. "I could buy up Alick Clyde five times over. Don't you think me a coarse brute?"

"I think you very odd."

"You are quite right; it suits my grain to be odd and rude both. I like to be odd, and I will be odd. Now, listen, for I have a thing to say."

"I am all attention."

"Sweet Rose, blooming Rose, should you like to be an old man's darling? to ride in a silken coach, to wear velvets and diamonds,

to hold up your beautiful head among the fairest, and proudest in the land, shaming their sickly charms by your rich glowing beauty, and graceful presence? I should like to address you in quaint English, and to say, good soothe, fair ladye, you are of a most sweet presence; do you think me mad?"

"An it please your good worship, which of your questions am I to answer first?" said Rose demurely, falling in with what she concluded to take as this strange man's pleasantry; he laughed at her little repartee, a joyous ringing laugh, but then relapsing into his old tone, he said dryly:—

"The first, by all means—should you like to be an old man's darling, if the old man were rich?"

"No."

"You refuse then to be Mrs. Middleton?"

He spoke now with a waggish smile lurking at the corners of his mouth.

"Yes."



"Do you know then what you refuse, three hundred thousand pounds?" Ah! what bliss the possession of such a sum would confer on Rose; even haughty Mrs. Clyde would have smiled upon her then, albeit she was John Toppleton's daughter; perhaps her face expressed something of this feeling, for Middleton, said, "You would have no objection to the money, but you would not like me."

"You are disposed to be merry at my expense."

"I annoy, I bore you, and no wonder; you don't like coarse rude people, Miss Toppleton, and you find me detestable. Well, and good, but perhaps I have some good qualities after all."

"Doubtless, you have," said Rose.

"Thank you," said Middleton shortly.

It was the twilight now of the short winter day, and Rose said she must go and assist her mother to prepare tea, and she asked Mr.

Middleton if she should bring him a cup ; he answered absently that he would thank her to do so, and she went out of his presence almost unnoticed by him, for he sat with his eyes fixed on the fire in a moody distracted manner, some chord unconsciously touched had awakened a train of painful reflections, and it seemed as though his merriment was over.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### CLAINES FARM.

ROSE found her mother surrounded by the children, toasting muffins, and scolding poor Johnnie, who met all her reproaches with stoical indifference, and cool determined arguments.

“To Church you *shall* go! Christmas Day, indeed! and not to go to church! where do you expect to go to?”

“To Fanly Pond, there’s skating there, and Miles is going in the morning.” Miles was the out-door servant at the “Cross Keys.”

"Where do you expect to go," retorted Mrs. Toppleton, "if you go skating on Christmas Day?"

"It's not like Sunday?"

"It is."

"It's not, you just ask Rose?"

"I think, Johnnie, all who can, ought to go to church on Christmas Day, you will have lots of fun afterwards, plum pudding and snap-dragon, and I have a nice christmas box from London for you."

"What is it?" cried Johnnie eagerly, "I hope it's no girl's toys, no Noah's ark, or any baby work like that, aye?"

"No, I have bought a Noah's ark for Tommie, it's a much more manly affair that I have brought you."

"I hope, Rose, you haven't bought the lad a gun?" said Mrs. Toppleton.

"I hope it's not a book," cried Johnnie.

"What is it, Rose?"

"Wait until to-morrow, and you shall see,"

said Rose, beginning to butter the muffins, "I wonder where my father is?" Almost as she spoke, Mr. Toppleton walked into the Bar, hung his hat on a peg, and sat down gloomily in front of the fire.

"What's the matter, father?" inquired Mrs. Toppleton in a shrill tone. She always called him father if he were ill, or out of sorts, and Mr. Toppleton at other times. Mr. Toppleton hid his face in his hands and groaned aloud.

"What have you been doing, father," continued Mrs. Toppleton, "are you ill? take a sup of brandy.

"No, no," he put his hand out helplessly, Rose took it, and carried it to her soft rosy lips; the little action, the eager fond wife, the good gentle graceful daughter, the little one's clinging about his knees, the love, the sympathy, the home scene, the comforts, the fire, the tempting meal, a consciousness that his own thoughtlessness was about to break up



THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO



**MR. POPPLETON'S DESPAIR.**

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MR. DOLITTLE'S DESPAIR

the little circle, and bring poverty and trouble on those dear ones, all these thoughts and circumstances weighed on John Toppleton; he burst into a fit of sobs and weeping—this frightened his wife; she had never seen him shed a tear before, and now that his hair was turning grey, and the lightness of youth had gone out of his step, it was dreadful to see him so cast down.

“What’s the matter, father?”

“Claines Farm, oh Rose!” looking into his child’s large pitiful eyes, “I’ve gone bail for Clayton of Claines Farm, for £2000, more than I’m worth in the world, stock, furniture, money in the bank, and all. Oh, God! I’m ruined,” he burst out furiously, “and I shall go mad. Clayton’s bolted to America a fortnight past; Mr. Clyde’s agent seized all his stock and cattle for the rent, and the lawyer sent after me to meet the bill. I’m ruined; they’ll take all I’ve got.”

“No, father dear,” said Rose, seriously, “you are too well known, too much respected,

to be ruined. We must borrow the money and pay it off by instalments."

"And saddle myself with a debt for life, spend all my time to pay that rascal Clayton's debts—no, I'll be hung first."

The deep sullen rage of a nature, slow to be roused, impossible to be appeased, burnt in John Toppleton's eyes. Mrs. Toppleton caught up the baby, sat down, and rocked herself to and fro, crying desperately, reproaching a little, she couldn't help it.

"I never knew nothink of it, nothink at all, it was too bad! I might have been asked, and the blessed lambs, to have to go to the workus."

"Five hundred pounds was all I had in the bank," said Toppleton sternly, "I've given them that, I took the clerk chap down to Saddler's and I give it him every halfpenny. Next week let them sell up this place, stock and stone. I won't borrow no money for Clayton's debts."

Meanwhile Johnnie had helped himself

- freely to the muffins, and he expressed a strong desire for tea, and in fine, the Toppleton's sat down to tea in spite of their troubles. I suppose Johnnie and Tommie did most of the eating, and afterwards Rose washed up the tea things, and put the little ones to bed. Toppleton could not face the customers, albeit they knew not of his troubles. Rose and her mother waited on them, and the sad consequences entailed on the family by the runaway tenant of Claines Farm were for the time ignored by the Toppletons.

## CHAPTER IX.

## ALICK CLYDE.

ALICK CLYDE came in about nine o'clock; the first thing he saw was old Middleton occupying a snug place near the fire, and Rose sitting near him knitting, which work she had to put down every five minutes to answer the demands of some gentlemen for punch or ale. If it was a degrading employment for a refined nature like Rose's to stoop to, all I can say is, that she was not degraded by it. She was as lady-like in that "bar," as though she had been giving French lessons to her class

of grown up young ladies at Miss Scribes, at Clapham.

The company consisted of little Mr. Timms, Doctor Roskins, Banks (the organist), and two or three quiet tradesmen, whose wives did not object to their taking a pipe or glass at the 'Cross Keys' now and then. The customers were aware this night of who Alick Clyde was, and so when he came into the bar he was welcomed, and he shook hands with little Mr. Timms.

The organist, who was an importation since the absence of young Clyde, nodded to him slightly. Alick was not a bit cast down now, whatever he might have been at Clyde Chase; he sat down and joked and laughed, smoked a cigar, and called for a bowl of punch, which he insisted on brewing himself. He put in port wine, lemons, sugar, brandy, spice, and rum, and hot water at discretion, and then he insisted on treating the whole company to a glass round, even Johnnie brought a little

glass to be filled, and Alick tried hard to persuade Rose to drink his health in a tiny bumper, but Rose pleaded headache and got excused.

The jokes of Alick fell harshly on her ears, she felt the great gulph between them, while she listened to his chaffing. He did not love her, she felt convinced of it now; he was not the least agitated by her presence, his eyes expressed kindness, admiration, nothing more, and since the morning he had not left her thoughts once; hope had been busy, memory had been awake, and now with his pleasant laugh in her ears, with his kind frank eyes, looking into hers, she felt a hopeless sickening of the heart, a wild loneliness, a sharp pang which the day before she had fancied were past out of her life for ever.

"What is the matter, Rose?" enquired Alick at length in a low tone. "You are sadly out of spirits."

The words reached the ears of Middleton.

"Are you never out of spirits, Mr. Clyde?"

"Well, no," said Alick, thrusting his hand up among his curly hair, "what's the good?"

"But trouble will come, let us say 'what's the good,' or no," said Middleton.

"Well, Rose," said Alick, gaily, "I hope you've no trouble."

His unconsciousness, her own griefs, both on her father's account and on her own, conspired to overcome Rose's firmness: she made a hasty excuse to her mother, and rushed out of the bar, across the kitchen, and into the little parlour, dark now, and with a few glimmering sparks only left in the grate Rose sat down and sobbed violently. Somebody walked into the room, and the voice of Alick said softly:—

"Rose!"

She did not answer.

"Rose, what's the matter?"

No answer still. Her sobs were too convulsive; he went to her and took her hand,



but she drew it from him again hastily; he took a chair and sat down near.

“My dear Rose, what are you crying for, won’t you tell me?”

Oh! Alick Clyde, what claim had you to the confidence of that warm, passionate, trusting, yet noble, nature? You had none, but she gave it you, some of it at least; she told you what she deemed her lesser grief, for in youth with organizations of the generous order, especially I think among women, pecuniary trouble is looked upon as a slight sorrow compared to those deeper disappointments, which acquire all their poignancy from the passions. To Rose, poverty was only dreadful, inasmuch as it grieved her parents; to herself it presented nothing more than an obligation to increased self sacrifice to labour, to patience, to devotion, and duty to her family.

But then Rose had never known poverty, had she known it she would not have despised

it. Those natures, be they fine and generous even, who have encountered the struggle of the arch fiend, 'poverty,'—I speak strongly, Reader, because I feel strongly on this subject—dare not scorn its attacks. I appeal to anyone whose youth has been darkened by the shadow of the wing of this dragon, to bear me out in my assertion. Poverty is a thing to be hated and dreaded, to be struggled against manfully with might and main, for it cramps the energies, breaks the spirits, in some instances destroys the health, and shortens life, and it is a curse which we should strive to lighten for those of our fellow creatures who suffer under its desolating influences; not only when Christmas snow lies deep, and Christmas fires burn bright, but "All the year round."

Rose told Alick Clyde that her father had gone bail for Clayton, of Claines Farm, and that they would have to leave the 'Cross Keys.'

Alick Clyde gave a long low whistle of surprise and consternation ; he saw no deeper into Rose's heart than she showed him. He knew not how slight a thing poverty really looked to her.

" You must borrow the money, Rose."

" My father says he won't—"

" Stuff, he'll alter his mind to-morrow."

" My father never alters his mind, Mr. Clyde."

" Mr. Clyde ! how strange it seems, Rose, that you have quite forgotten all our little love affair ; its best, I know, of course, but upon my honour, Rose, I shall always like you," and Alick Clyde tried to kiss her again, but Rose held him off. " What a prude you have grown, Rose," said he, pettishly.

" I have been living three years in France, and the young unmarried ladies there are very decorous. I have acquired their customs, and way of thinking," said Rose, trying to speak cheerfully.

"I wish you had never gone there then," said Alick, more pettishly then before.

He had made love to a dozen girls since he had parted from Rose Toppleton six years before, and she held no deeper place in his affections than any other, whose love he had lightly sought, and as lightly left, but he wanted to flirt with her sadly, his vanity was piqued, nothing more. And the thought came to Rose, as she sat there in the darkness, that Alick Clyde had never known the depth of the love she had borne him, and acting on the spur of her impulsive nature, she resolved that she would rouse him from his gay unconsciousness, and tell him of what had been; she would speak of it as dead, and past, he should never know anything he could say or do now had power to give her pain; but he should not think her nature was as unconscious as his own.

"Ought there not to be a wide gulph placed, Mr. Clyde, between a gentleman of

ancient lineage, a landed owner, and a girl in humble life like Rose Toppleton? Why, your mother's maid, very likely, considers me beneath her."

"Does she?" said Alick, "I never considered the subject, the question, I mean."

"Consider it now, then!"

"Rose, I am a lazy fellow, I never take the trouble to consider much about anything."

"Abide then by my decision: I have well considered the subject. I will have no more trifling, and light love making from you, Mr. Alick Clyde; we are not equals."

"Rose, how seriously you take things."

"*Once* I did, once I did, Alick Clyde, when you spoke words, loving words in my untutored ears. Oh, how I poured out my affections, to be trampled under your careless feet, and your mother's; to be spurned, mocked, coaxed, and left, as you may have seen a child throw away a toy, of which he is tired; speak

no more light words to me, Alick Clyde, the old pain is over, the old wound is healed; but your voice and your tone bring back a time, when to love seemed anguish. I have learned to laugh at our old folly now, but speak no more love speeches. I remember the time when I believed them, and you willed that I should do so."

"Rose, you were a mere child then, you have grown a wonderfully wise woman now, I shall be quite afraid of you." The cold obtuse perception, the unconsciousness, the hardness of the young worldling! what a being to have wasted love and tears, and thought upon; he was not startled at the tremulous passion in Rose's tones, he could detect no lingering of the old love when she reproached him even. To his thinking Rose had come back full of serious notions, she was indisposed to flirt, and disposed to scold, and he resolved not to encounter her more than he could help; he hated to be talked to seriously;

Alick was as utterly devoid of sentiment as the most absolutely matter of fact and scheming mother could desire. Is he such a loss to Rose then after all? I trow not.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE WAITS.

THE Cross Keys closed at eleven o'clock, and everybody went to bed. Rose could not sleep, the spirit of unrest was with her. She had found out a great secret, Alick Clyde had never really loved her, he was not capable of love. I think, reader, that there is nothing so effective (though so painful) for the cure of love, as to become fully, and deeply persuaded in one's own mind that the idol of our affections does not, and cannot, respond to our devotion—when hope is completely dead,



when we know that all our watchings and strivings are useless lumber, I verily believe love will die a natural death, and it is "a consummation devoutly to be wished."

"Am I mad that I should cherish  
That which bears but bitter fruit?  
I will pluck it from my bosom  
Though my heart be at the root."

But the hero of Locksley Hall was all this while fully persuaded that his "Amy shallow hearted" loved him still, and a cure under these circumstances, is more difficult.

Rose, however, albeit she could not rest, was fast awakening to a sense, a fevered one, perhaps, but still a sense of Alick Clyde's unworthiness, heartlessness, shallowness. She knew she could never marry him, she understood the full value of his social rank, and the immense space that separated them, the thought of such a thing was madness, but his unconscious coldness, his apathy to all she had suffered, his undervaluing of her affection ;

these things stung her to the soul, she almost began to despise Alick Clyde. Miss Lucy Roberts, in Framley Parsonage when trying to analyse the cause of her love for Lord Lufton, comes to the conclusion, that it was his well-formed legs she was enamoured of; many of us, if we were to enquire as strictly into the reasons of our infatuation, would be equally startled at the result. Nine cases out of ten there is not any better cause for the rhapsodies we get into about our fellow creatures, than the one Miss Lucy alleged.

Rose got up and dressed herself, because she could not sleep, and she lighted a lamp, and determined to go and search for a book, all her own were left with her luggage at St. John's, but she thought there might happily be an odd volume of the Spectator on the shelf in the little parlour, and to while away an hour with this quaint tome seemed pleasanter to her than lying awake. And

why have I loved Alick Clyde, she asked herself? Don't you think, reader, you who have seen into his nature; don't you think that his crisp curling hair was perhaps greatly to blame for all poor Rose had suffered? Just as Rose came out of her room, a sweet weird-like strain of music broke into the stillness of the night, and thrilled deliciously to her very soul. It was but an old world air, but one whose every chord is melody methinks, but then I have a weakness for old simple tunes, which not all the performances at the Opera can tear out of my nature. "Robin Adair" came softly wafted on the night wind, then died away, then swelled out again, then seemed to fade away as it were into airy stillness, then again burst out with renewed pathos. She had heard good music abroad, but the English girl was spell bound by the sweet melody; she went into the little parlour, and held the lamp in her hand still listening.

"It's the waits," said a gruff voice at her side.

She started violently, for there sat old Middleton, leaning awkwardly with his elbows on the table.

"Mr. Middleton!"

"Miss Toppleton!"

"Our names don't sound romantic together, do they?"

"I came for a book," said Rose, hastily, "I cannot sleep to-night."

"Neither can I, and I stole down here for no earthly purpose that I know of, and now will you stay and talk to me, or will you go off again? You have no books worth reading on that shelf."

"It's twelve o'clock, Mr. Middleton!"

"What of that?"

"Every body is in bed."

"So much the better. I want to talk to you, and we shall not be interrupted. If I make any remarks that are unpleasant,

you can leave me; you are not afraid of me?"

"No," said Rose, frankly.

"Very well, now we will open the shutters, and look at the moon, at the quiet country-fied street, at the closed shops, at the stillness, at the snow; the waits are gone now; there," he drew the shutters back as he spoke, and put out the light. Rose looked at the bright quiet moon, at the snowy street, at the silvery black clouds; she remained standing, she meant to go away, but a strange feeling of curiosity impelled her to linger. Middleton interested her in spite of herself, notwithstanding his roughness, he was never disrespectful, and what he said and did, he seemed in earnest about.

"How scornfully yon moon looks down upon us," said Middleton.

"How sweetly rather," said Rose.

"But if it have never happened that human eyes have looked at you coldly, human eyes

in whose light you lived, and for whose love you have longed, you cannot understand my feeling when I see the cold, bright, distant moon, calm, beautiful, scornful."

"What a strange thought!" said Rose.

"I know a pond," said Middleton, "where green boughs dip in the summer time, a clear, cool shady pond, with pure water lilies floating on its surface, and lovely blue convolvulus and bright dog roses tangling among the shrubs, and great trees that border its margin; I have bathed in that pond in my youth, when the sun blazed hot in the heavens, and its refreshing waters were so delightful to me that I lingered on its banks all day. At last the heat grew less, the sun went down, the damp sad twilight came on, and still I loitered by the pond. But when the summer night came forth in all its glory, and the effulgent moon sailed slowly along, and cast her weird influence over the glancing pond, and its broidery of water lilies, I thought the moon

seemed to scorn me; and now," continued Middleton, with a light laugh, "don't you think me a dreaming old fool?"

"No," said Rose, simply, "I have had such dreams myself."

"They tell us such fancies unfit us for the real business of life. Do you think so, Miss Toppleton?"

"So few," said Rose, diffidently "with whom I have come in contact, seem to have such fancies, or to find any beauty, in such objects as a deep, still pond, floating with water lilies, or a margin of great trees, with bright flowers tangling about their feet. To most people it seems to me, 'A primrose growing on a river's brink, a yellow primrose is, and nothing more,' to drive a good bargain, make a purchase, or go out to a party, are more in accordance with most people's ideas of pleasure; the dreamers, though decried, are I think in the minority, one hardly ever meets with any but matter of fact people."

"Is it not better? What if all were dreamers? Where would be our railroads, our steam ships, our telegraph?"

"Take away a few of our railroads," said Rose, smiling, "and give us a few more dreamers!"

"There is enough reality, and sad reality, alas! in this life, Miss Rose, to employ our time, and thoughts, without one idle dream; but you as yet know nothing of trouble."

"We are in trouble, all of us," said Rose.

And she told old Middleton of her father's embarrassment, and asked him to advise him to borrow the money.

"If I could help you," said Middleton, stiffly, and his manner visibly changing, "I should be glad; but when I told you I had three hundred thousand pounds, I only joked. I am poor, and I must labour hard with my two hands to support myself."

"I think," said Rose, on whose ears this information fell without causing them to burn



in the least, "I think if you were to talk to my father, he might attend to you; and now, Mr. Middleton, I will say good night; here is a match, will you light my lamp?"

He did so; and as he put it in her hand, he said:—

"Is it not a pity that I am not a rich man, and cannot help your father?"

"Anybody will lend it him," said Rose, "if he can only be persuaded to borrow."

"Do you think so? wait until you try. Your father has no security to give, has he? beyond his furniture and stock in trade. I am afraid you will be obliged to leave the Cross Keys."

"What a business man you seem, now," said Rose, "you speak with two voices."

"Because I am made up of two natures; one I was born with, the other the world has given me."

"Good night," and Middleton and Rose clasped hands slightly, and parted.

## CHAPTER XI.

## CHRISTMAS DAY.

ROSE went back to her room, and thought strange thoughts ; she had deserted her home when it seemed a pleasant, secure home : now she had come back again, willing to perform her part, to take her place cheerfully as daughter of the house, to gladden her mother's heart, to take care of the children, to do those common every-day works which are so useful, so becoming, so necessary, and it all seemed useless. The humble, pleasant, secure home, with its sunny fruit-garden behind,

and quiet street in front, was to be theirs no longer. The fires which had blazed on its hearthstones were henceforth to brighten at a stranger's bidding. They were to go out into the world,—father, mother, bairns. She sat leaning her elbow on the table, and she lost present consciousness, sleep came upon her unawares, and Rose dreamed a dream.

She seemed standing in a vast hall, such as one reads of in the olden times, an enormous fire blazed in the centre, lamps hung from the walls; the hall was decked with holly branches in great profusion, and a strain of most unearthly music—unearthly, because ravishingly sweet—stole down the vast area, and, lo! and behold! the hall began to fill with knights in armour, such as one only sees in paintings, or at the armoury at the Tower—knights whose faces were hidden by their helmets, stalwart knights and true; and then there came in ladies; ladies with wimples and hoods, such as one sees also only in pic-

tures; and the knights and the ladies danced strange dances in time to the strange music; they passed before the eyes of Rose vividly, "treading measures." No one noticed her, the weird company seemed silent, she heard no whisper to remind her that she stood among her fellow beings. Presently there came to her a black knight, encased completely in a suit of mail: he was tall above his fellows, he did not speak, but he took her hand, and led her forth unresisting to join the dancers, and still the strange music played, and Rose and the knight danced together, slowly at first, then faster, and faster, until it became a complete giddy whirl; he still held her hand, and she implored him to stop; he complied, and led her to a seat, and then, for the first time, he spoke:—

"You shall drink sweet wine," said the knight.

And he presented to her a silver goblet with sparkling wine in it. Rose put it to her

lips, and drank what she always afterwards averred tasted like the most delicious beverage possible; but presently its flavour altered, and she found that she was taking the bitterest medicine.

She strove to put the goblet from her, but the knight forced her to drain it to the dregs, then he threw it scornfully on the ground, saying:—

“So much for dancing, so much for sweet wine; come out and look at your home,” and Rose, still obeying, followed the strange knight to the hall. And she saw a ruined house, with broken windows and roof, the floors torn up, and grass growing in what had once been her father’s neat home-like rooms. The blue sky—it seemed a summer sky—was visible, and playing among the ruins was a ragged, deserted, bare-footed child. Rose looked, and saw the blue eyes and fair curls of her own little brother Tommie Toppleton.

Orphan he must have been, or he never

would have been so neglected ; he looked up at her dreamily and sadly through his curls, as though she had been a stranger, and then passed mournfully out of sight.

“ And now,” said the knight, “ I will leave you, but put this on first,” and he forced on the third finger of her left hand a plain gold ring. “ You are my wife now !”

“ Whose wife ?” she asked.

“ Guess, before I take off my visor.”

“ Alick’s,” murmured Rose.

The knight tore off his head gear, and she found herself face to face with old Middleton, and before she had time to feel sorry or otherwise she awoke, feeling very cold and tired ; so she crept to bed and slept soundly, and a friend of hers, to whom she was in the habit of relating the dream afterwards, declared that she had imagined it all from a scene in a pantomime, an accusation she always indignantly denied.



Christmas morning bright and freezing, the small Toppletons clamouring round the breakfast table ; Rose busy, neat, quiet ; Mrs. Toppleton in low spirits, declaring she felt too unwell to go to church, and indeed her eyes bore witness to the pain she felt in her head.

"Father would not get up," she said, "and there would only be Rose and Johnnie to go to church."

Johnnie begged hard to be excused, but his mother was firm on that point. She was determined that all her household should be strict attendants at church.

Rose reminded her mother of sundry baskets of eatables which were to be carried to the poor, "And this warm shawl I bought in London, mother, for old Mrs. Wright."

"I ought to take it myself by rights,"—Mrs. Toppleton began to weep. "By another Christmas day these blessed lambs will want somebody to send 'em a dinner ; it's too bad of father, it is upon my word !"

"I shall open a school, mother," said Rose.

Mrs. Toppleton had a great contempt for the idea of a school, such a school as she supposed Rose meant, to which the tradespeople send their children daily in country towns, and pay ten shillings a quarter. There was such a school at Ashton, kept by two young ladies named Williams; they lived in lodgings, and had a sitting room, a school room, and two bed rooms. They paid twenty-five pounds a year for these furnished rooms, and they had about twenty-five pupils at the terms mentioned—ten shillings a quarter; they had two boarders, who paid them twenty pounds a year each, and this is what the Misses Williams had to live upon.

Mrs. Toppleton knew all about them, because they had been to solicit the attendance of Tommie at their seminary, but Tommie Toppleton entertained a supreme contempt for learning, and refused pertinaciously to patronise the Misses Williams' establishment. His mother entreated, fawned upon him, permitted



him to overdo himself with butter, gave him smuggled half-pence, promised him a gun, a kite, a pair of skates, and a wheelbarrow when he should become a man; though what use the young gentleman contemplated putting the last named conveyance to at that interesting period this history sayeth not.

Tommie accepted the half-pence, did terrible things in the butter line, talked largely of his expectancies (as many another youth has done before and since), but after all he remained the plague of the Cross Keys. His mother was ten shillings a quarter richer, the Misses Williams' were exactly that sum the poorer, and Tommie triumphed generally.

"What stuff you talk, Rose, a school! Look at the little Williams's. Poor girls! they are coming to tea with us this evening, by the way."

"That's right, mother," said Rose, "but I don't mean a school like Lina Williams's. I mean to give lessons in great families in

London. Why, you forget mother, I understand German and French. I can earn enough to keep you like a Queen."

"I shall be a butcher when I'm a man," remarked Johnnie, "and then we shall have lots of meat if we're ever so poor."

This was Johnnie's logic; it was followed by an assertion on the part of Tommie that he would be a big man and carry a gun.

"I'll be a big man too, Tommie," remarked the baby, turning her tiny face towards her admired brother.

"It's time for you to go and get washed and dressed for church, Johnnie," said Mrs. Toppleton; "make haste with your breakfast;" so Johnnie sopped his crusts slowly in his tea, and floated them like boats on the surface; he eat them one by one, in rotation, then sipped the remainder of his tea, leisurely expressed a wish for another slice of bread and butter, and lingered generally over his breakfast until his mother aroused

him by a peremptory order to make haste, and go and get washed.

At last Johnnie obeyed, and at a quarter to eleven, Rose and the young gentleman aforesaid stood ready dressed on the threshold of the 'Cross Keys.'

Rose wore a dress of a silken texture and silver grey colour, trimmed charmingly, with a broad rich velvet at the foot of the skirt, a long graceful black cloth cloak, and the most piquant straw bonnet it has ever been my lot to behold, with little pink roses inside it, amid which her own sweet face, a rose in itself, looked quite beautiful. Johnnie, with clean hands, and well oiled hair, shining boots, and warm great coat, stood with a dull and heavy countenance, trying to balance his prayer book on the tip of his walking stick, and dropping it perpetually on the snow-hardened ground.

"What are you waiting for, Rose?" called out Mrs. Toppleton from the bar.

"Mr. Middleton, mother; he has asked if he may walk to church with us."

Presently, Mr. Middleton joined them; he had cast off his corderoy gaiters, and stood encased in a respectable grey suit of rough warm material. He wore clumsy boots, however, and no gloves.

"I hate gloves," was all he condescended to remark as he joined Rose, and offered her his arm.

"You'd better take it," said he, when she hesitated. "It's slippery." It was a strong, firm, protecting arm to lean upon. Rose walked along famously.

The Ashton folks were bearing towards St. Mark's, and Rose exchanged friendly nods with many.

They entered the large old church of St. Mark's, with its numerous tablets, bearing various inscriptions, but telling all of them the oft told tale—

**"Departed This Life."**

How coldly oft times our eyes rest on these awful solemn words cut in stone.

“Departed this life!” Gone from street and shop, and market, and steam ship, and railroad; gone for ever from cheerful parlour, or lordly salon, or humble kitchen; from all the houses ever made with hands, from all the cheerful sound of human voices, from wrath and anger, and clamour, from joy, and love, and friendship, from Christmas fires, and summer sunshine, and cool shade beneath rustling foliage!

“Departed this life!”

The Church was bright with holly, however, and there was such a glorious branch twisted round the brass rod of the lamp in the Toppletons’ pew, and Johnnie began to pick off surreptitiously berries, and prickly leaves, by way of beguiling—alas! that I should write it—the heavy hours of church service; he was thinking of Miles and Fanly pond, and the merry skaters, longingly, feverishly.

Poor Johnnie, how cold the church was too, how his feet ached ! Oh, when would it be over ! I know children ought to be taught to go to church, but I wish people took more pains to explain it to them ; to most of them it is weary work, they do not have their religious sympathies the least awakened by the prayers, to them incomprehensible, for the most part, and the sermons !! we all know some preachers, who stand boldly up, and make their voices to be heard, like the sound of the trumpet awakening the sleepers, and arresting the attention of the thoughtless ; but these are in the minority. The general voice, which sounds from the general pulpit, is monotonous, dull, sometimes harsh, menacing, and terrifying to those with weak nerves, seldom beneficial, I verily believe, to us poor thoughtless, dying mortals.

Mr. Evan got into the pulpit and preached. I believe he was a good old man, but he had long outlived the affections and sympathies

of his earlier days, and he was naturally of a severe ascetic temperament.

He made small, if any, allowance, for the natural buoyancy of youth, with its hopes, its fears, its keen joys, its poignant sorrows, its fevered desires, its scorching passions; these things in the course of nature were dead within him, and he willed that they should be dead in his hearers, old and young. He went to war with pleasure in any shape; I verily believe he accounted that intense love of the beautiful, which leads to the worship of nature, as a crime; he had no poetry in his soul, no idea of beauty, saving the beauty of holiness interminable, dispiriting were his sermons. It was our fault, I suppose, that we did not hear and profit by them. He was nearly seventy, or thereabouts, at the time I write of, his discourse on Christmas day, was chiefly directed to the shewing of the sinfulness that existed at this season, in the way of amusements;

he decried the parties, forfeits, games, &c. I think he did not preach against plum puddings; I do not mean to be irreverent, but he succeeded in sending some of his audience out of church considerably depressed in spirits, and miserable generally.

And then Banks struck up a joyous voluntary. May fate reward thee, rosy Banks, for that glorious stabat mater, it came like sunshine after rain; and Rose, and Johnnie, and Middleton walked down the aisle. Alick Clyde was not at church, not he; he never went at all, except it was to hear a very celebrated, and very orthodox preacher in Birmingham, which last good christian, and excellent gentleman had succeeded in penetrating once, or twice, even the thoughtless nature of young Clyde. All honour to the kindly genius of Dr. Mostyn; of course, I don't give his right name. Would that we had more preachers like him!

"Departed this life." Mr. Middleton came



to a dead stand, before a richly sculptured tablet with cherubs in white marble, and a figure of woe, it was in memory of some of the Clydes. "This monument is sacred to the memory of Isabel, the beloved wife of Leolf Clyde, of Clyde Chase, Esq., who departed this life in giving birth to a son, on the fifteenth day of April, one thousand eight hundred and twenty five. 'Requisat in Pace.' Also of Leolf Clyde, the only son of the above named Leolf and Isabel Clyde, who was drowned off the harbour of Rio Janeiro, in the month of June, 1846, when the ship Columbine went down, and every soul on board perished."

"The Lord grant unto him, 'That he may find mercy of the Lord in that day,' 2 Tim., 1 chap., 18 ver." Thus read the inscription.

"And is this Leolf Clyde any relation to your great favourite, Miss Toppleton?"

"His half brother," said Rose.

"It's a pretty monument," said Middleton,

and then they walked out of Church ; how glad Johnnie was to find himself bearing towards home, and the pudding ; he ran on before the others a long way.

“ Don’t you pity me, Miss Rose ? ” asked Middleton “ to think that I’m forced to beg a dinner of you on Christmas day.

“ To beg a dinner ? ”

“ Yes, to beg you to accept my company at least. Look at me with no relations, no home, no wife, do you not pity me ? ”

“ Yes,” said Rose gently.

“ Thank you for your little straight forward answer ; you do pity me.”

They walked on a little while silently.

“ I wish I had a wife,” said Middleton at length, “ a gentle wife, and true, I would have her fair, and wise, but above all I would have her good, with a soul answering to my soul, and a love of all things beautiful. I would I had such a wife.—Silence again, Rose ? ”

“ Yes.”

"Your tone is cold and calm. I don't like that so well as your last. I am falling in love with you, Rose Toppleton."

"With me?"

"Aye! with you, an old man, who is poor and rough, loves sweet Rose Toppleton, as he never thought to love woman; his arms are strong, and they will shield her; his heart is full of her image, he will find life desolate without her; but with her by his side, he will defy the world. What answer do you make to this, Rose Toppleton?"

"I saw you, sir, yesterday, for the first time."

"Is that your answer? That is no answer. Though I never met you before, yet have you grown already into my heart. I will not be trifled with, or trampled on, although my hair is grey and my back bent."

"I have no wish to trifle with anything so sacred as human affection, God knows," said Rose, solemnly.

"Somebody then has trifled with you,"

said Middleton. "Your great favourite, young Clyde? Hah, Hah!" his voice was terribly harsh, as he burst into this scornful laugh.

"You have no right"—began Rose.

"I have a right, the right of a man, who already loves you; you are the embodiment of my boyhood's fancies, the realisation of the dreams of my youth. I look at you with the eye of a lover; with the admiration of a poet; with the judgment of a keen man of the world; you are altogether excellent, Rose Toppleton, and if you think me presumptuous, and my suit folly, tell me so at once."

His tone was now that of a polished gentleman—deep, rich, manly; Rose felt strongly drawn towards this strange being, and there was a certain fascination in his bright grey eye that she could not resist; she gave him a promise, she actually said she would consider the offer of this unknown, who was as old as her father, and then when

they entered the Cross Keys she rushed at once to her own room to question her sanity, and to marvel at the impertinence of old Middleton.

John Topleton came down to dinner; he tried to be cheerful, as it was Christmas Day; he endeavoured to forget the sword that hung over his head.

There was a fire in the little parlour, and the Topletons and Mr. Middleton sat down to dinner there. Rose, in her grey silk dress, her pink neck ribbon, and abundant brown hair, looked perfect, but Johnnie and Tommie found the well-browned turkey infinitely more attractive; there were sausages, and there was tongue, and roast beef, and vegetables at discretion, there was bottled stout, and there was sweet cider; how the small Topletons did eat; then came the pudding all in a blaze, and Johnnie and Tommie clamoured for pieces of the fire; there were mince pies and cheesecakes; and

when it was all over, there was wine and cake, and there were apples, and French plums, and pears; and I record it as a most astonishing fact, that not one of the small Toppletons suffered in the least from indigestion, and none of them were under the painful necessity of swallowing rhubarb and magnesia, which atrocious mixture was patronised by Mrs. Toppleton, and was administered to her "blessed lambs" when any of them were ill.

About three in the afternoon the Misses Williamss, who kept the day school, came in, very nicely dressed in blue merinos, and black velvet jackets; they were pretty dark girls of from twenty to twenty-five; they were very jolly, considering they were governesses; and later in the evening Mr. Elton, the clerk at the foundry, came in; a short, slight young man with a Grecian nose, and black hair, who thought himself a beauty, and that all the girls were in love with him, at least so Kate

Williams said, I give her as my authority. He did not speak very good English, but he thought he was a fine scholar, and he expressed himself slowly and methodically; he played at all the Christmas games condescendingly, and as though he was out of his proper sphere.

There was yet another young man of the party, whose father was the Supervisor of the Excise at Ashton, and who was himself traveller for a grocer; his name was George Martin, and he had red hair, and a round red face; he did not think himself a beauty, but he thought the eatables at the Cross Keys capital, and he eat more muffins and rashers at tea than I like to think of. He tried to sing a song after tea, and broke down in it; whereupon everybody laughed.

The little Toppletons would not go to bed because it was Christmas Day, so they sat up and played blind man's buff, and hunt the slipper, and other merry games; there was a

mistletoe and there were forfeits, and once it fell to Middleton's lot to lead Rose under the branch, and instead of taking advantage, the rough old fellow only lifted her hand gently to his lips.

Everything must have an end, however, and so it came to pass, that this Christmas party broke up; at length the guests departed, the Cross Keys closed, and Christmas Day was swept into the past.



## CHAPTER XII.

## ABOUT APPLE GATHERING.

MR. Fossett was a first-class country solicitor, his offices were situate in Steel Street, Birmingham, which is not, I must respectfully intimate, by any means the real name of the street I have in my mind's eye at this moment. Mr. Fossett, however, flourishes, for aught I know to the contrary, at this very hour in Steel Street, and it would not do for me to particularise the residence of a most highly respectable professional gentleman more exactly. Mr. Fossett owned a handsome

house and grounds at Edgbaston, the fruits of professional labours. By the bye, what excellent golden apples gentlemen of Mr. Fossett's calling do contrive to gather for themselves. It seems to me that no Dagon guards the golden fruit from them, and that whatsoever their eyes desire, they speedily obtain, when there is a great draft of fishes; gold and silver fishes of course I mean, into whose net does the abundant spoil find its way, into whose net? when sons are wild, and fathers careless, and wives extravagant, and it is necessary to shake the tree, the family tree on which grow the golden apples aforesaid, in order that a few may fall down out of season, to relieve the immediate necessities of the owners; who picks up the largest, brightest, soundest of the balls of gold and puts them into his pocket as part payment for the trouble he has been put to, in shaking the tree for the rest? Is it not invariably Mr. Pocket-all, of the highly respectable firm of Charge-up, Long-

bill, Pocket-all and Co., who appropriates the best of the bargain to himself? No doubt it's all very right. There is something so awfully respectable, reader, in a real, thriving, rich, educated lawyer, whose offices are covered with Brussels carpeting, who sits in an expensive arm chair, who has other offices below, where obedient clerks work at all hours, and where clients, patient, and impatient, wait oftentimes with beating hearts until their turn comes to present themselves before the august arbiters of their fate.

Ah! I bethink me of certain hot summer days four years ago, when the writer of this story and his brother had occasion to linger in the lower offices of the great Mr. Fossett, until the time came when we were summoned up to the carpeted room where the aforesaid gentleman was wont to give us audience. We were about selling a poor little property, reader, to the value of a few poor little hundreds, and great was our terror that the

worthy Mr. Fossett in his might, and his wealth, and his overwhelming respectability would bring his charges up to the full amount of the poor little property in question; he didn't, however, but he took excellent care of himself, notwithstanding; and, admitting that they were half a dozen apples between us, I think I must say that Mr. Fossett got two very large juicy ones for his pains. I shall never forget the nervous twitchings I used to experience when climbing those steep stairs of Mr. Fossett's; and my brother, who was twenty one and ignorant of law, declares to this day, that the weakness he experienced in his legs during the time of ascending the said stairs was something impossible to define. How would Mr. Fossett like to hear that, I wonder? but I suppose he would not care much about it, it would be beneath his notice. All hail to thee, Fossett, and to thy apple gathering, which never ceases, but goes on all the year round! I think there must be quite

an orchard in thy possession by this time, for who can plant the golden seed in goodly ground where it will strike root downwards, and bear fruit upwards a hundred fold, better than thou canst do? Go on, Fossett, I am jealous of you, I want some of your apples. I don't for an instant pretend they are sour, not I! I am above such mean subterfuges, they are "sweet, sweet, sweet," oh, Fossett! "piercing sweet, by the river," or the wood, or the street, or the market, or any where in fact where they can be obtained.

Forgive my vile misappropriation of Mrs. Barrett Browning's address to the great god Pan, and now, if you please, reader, I will introduce you to Mr. Fossett in *propria persona*.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### MR. FOSSETT'S CLIENT.

THE day but one following Christmas day, a very elegant perfumed lady was ushered into the handsome furnished office where Mr. Fossett was sitting before his black leather-covered table. Mr. Fossett rose and put the lady a chair, politely enough it is true, and just politely *enough*, nothing more, not the slightest *empressement*, scarcely a smile of welcome; business was written on every line of Mr. Fossett's face. It was not by any means a deeply lined face, however, and

business was stamped with his habitual smile. Upon his lip you could read, "Fossett, Dunker, and Co.," (there was a Mr. Dunker, a junior partner, who had a very well furnished office on the first floor), you could read Fossett and Dunker, Solicitors, Steel Street, Birmingham, in the curl of his light whiskers, in his pure white shirt front, in the very sparkle of the diamond ring on the fair, fat fourth finger of his left hand. Mr. Fossett was not more than two, or three, and forty; he was a fair, florid man, with bright blue eyes, cold blue eyes they looked in the office in Steel Street, but perchance in the luxurious home at Edgbaston, they may have beamed more kindly. He was a gentlemanly man, a sensible man, and perhaps he had, after all, no keener appreciation of the great necessity of looking after number one, than many other legal gentlemen of my acquaintance, whose shirt fronts are not so dazzling, whose offices are not so handsome, whose complexions are

not so brilliant, and whose manners are not so refined as those of the Golden Apple gatherer I am talking about.

The lady put up her veil, and approached the large red fire. She was a mass of purple velvet, and golden bracelets, and brocaded silk; she took off one glove, and the small lady-like brown hand she held towards the fire was loaded with jewels; the face of this lady was thin and dark, with well-formed features, and flashing black eyes; she looked about seven, or eight, and forty, and her name was Mrs. Leolf Clyde, of "Clyde Chase," in the county of —.

"Mr. Fossett, I am Mrs. Leolf Clyde, of Clyde Chase."

Mr. Fossett bent his head politely — politely enough, you understand, and nothing more.

"Yesterday we received, I received, I generally read the whole of the business letters, I received your peremptory letter, stating that your client intended to foreclose



the mortgages, *if* the whole £60,000 be not paid by next week."

Mr. Fossett put the points of the fingers of his two hands together, leaned back in his chair, and looked over his hands very coolly at Mrs. Clyde.

"The interest has not been paid up, Mrs. Clyde, for the last two years."

"It is such a dreadful thing, Mr. Fossett—so sudden. We cannot scrape together above eight hundred pounds by next week. Your client will not surely be so cruel as to bring ruin upon us?"

"There will of course be a long legal process," said Mr. Fossett, "before my client can claim the estate. You will have plenty of time to collect the money."

"How long?"

"Quite a twelvemonth."

"But it would be utterly impossible to get £60,000 together, I am afraid, in twelve months. Our rent-roll is not quite three thousand a year."

Mr. Fossett looked as though it was wearisome to him to have to listen to details with which he considered that he had nothing on earth to do.

"You must try, nevertheless; since I am convinced my client is quite anxious to get the estate. He is a thorough hard-working, determined man. He has made his fortune in the colonies, and now he is come home, and he wants to obtain a landed estate. He has advanced the money, you see, and as the land is not entailed, you can't keep him out of it; unless you pay up the mortgage," he added, presently.

Mr. Fossett stated the facts drily. He knew that in the offices below impatient clients were stamping their heels, and he wished very much that the lady in velvet would take her departure, but the lady was not so minded.

"It will ruin my son," said Mrs. Clyde, piteously. "And the estate that has been in the family for centuries, will go into the

hands of a low, vulgar, Australian digger. Great heaven ! it's dreadful !”

Mr. Fossett began to mend a pen, and said nothing ; perhaps he thought silence would be the most effective means of ridding him of his visitor.

“ My son will be forced to work for his living ; we shall all be starved,” said Mrs. Clyde. “ Oh, Mr. Fossett, can't you ask this Jarvis to stay proceedings ; not to commence next week ?”

“ But it seems, madam, that you don't hold out any hope of discharging the debt at all. I must know what grounds I go upon before I can recommend any such course to my client.”

“ Tell him it will ruin us—break my heart—bring disgrace on my son—be the death of Mr. Clyde !”

Poor Mrs. Clyde had yet to learn that passions, and sorrows, and feelings, can find no room in such offices as those of Messrs.





**LEGAL IMPASSIBILITY.**

## THEORY

The first part of the paper is devoted to the

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LEGAL IMPOSSIBILITY.

Fossett and Dunker, solicitors, Steel Street. With all her mingled ambition, love of display, family pride, love for her son, haughty spurning of the vulgar, and with little or no pity for the sufferings of those beneath her, she had yet what she considered an almost chivalrous respect for the sorrows of those in her own class; she could not, therefore, comprehend this quiet, fresh-looking lawyer, and his low, brutal client, daring to ignore her importance, and to make no more of disinheriting her well-born son than they would have done of selling up the stock of Farmer Clayton, of Claines Farm, her husband's run-away tenant.

"It will ruin us—break my heart—be the death of Mr. Clyde!"

Mr. Fossett put down the pen he had mended, rose to his feet, and leaned against the mantel-piece.

"Have you no means whatever of raising the money, Mrs. Clyde?"



"Only by the marriage of my son with an heiress."

Mr. Fossett smiled coldly, and said nothing. I suppose that he considered that heiresses were at a premium just then.

"And will you do nothing, Mr. Fossett? Will you not ask your client to be merciful?"

"You see, these are terms we never use in business, Mrs. Clyde. The best thing you can do, will be to try and raise the money. Will you pardon me, if I hint that there are crowds of people waiting below to see me?"

Mrs. Clyde looked aghast, at the insolence of the man of business; she said not one word, but swept angrily from the room, down the stairs, and into her carriage, which was waiting for her in Steel Street; the poor lady had begun to experience the darkening of the dragon's wing, "the dragon poverty."

## CHAPTER XIV.

### ALICK CLYDE'S WOOING.

THE night of the same day that she had driven into Birmingham to see Mr. Fossett, Mrs. Clyde lay on a crimson sofa in her dressing room, in front of a bright fire ; she was, what some people call "upset" with her morning's journey, more than thirty miles there and back, and above all with the disagreeable termination to her efforts.

The room she occupied was rather gloomy, as were most of the rooms at Clyde Chase. It was wainscoted, and paneled with cedar, and

the ceiling was of carved oak, but there was a centre piece beautifully painted, representing Calyspo and her Nymphs, rescuing the son of Ulysses from the waves. Curtains of crimson were drawn over the windows, their heavy gold fringes looked splendid by the lamp light; there was a beautiful toilette table, with a looking glass in a silver gilt frame; and scent cases, and jewel boxes were lying about in luxurious profusion. The floor of this room was of polished oak, with a rich Turkey carpet before the fire; Mrs. Clyde wore a loose robe of sky blue cashmere, her black hair, untouched with gray, was rolled under a sky blue cap, her sallow, anxious, thin face, with its worn, and weary expression, would have moved a beholder's pity, but that its look of hauteur forbade such a feeling.

A French maid, young, pretty and coquetish, was moving lightly about, arranging various things.

“Christine, go to the dining-room, and if

Mr. Alick has dined, tell him to come to me at once.’’

So Christine tripped lightly down the wide staircase, and into the lighted hall, and she stopped at the door of the dining room, where Mr. Clyde, cousin Jack, and Monsieur Alick, were talking over their wine ; Christine put in her head, and requested the presence of Monsieur Alick, and Monsieur Alick was not long in obeying the summons of his Mamma.

He entered the room, approached the fireplace, stirred the fire, stretched his limbs, yawned, flung himself into a chair, and enquired of his mother, carelessly :—

“ What’s the row about, now ?”

“ My dear Alick,” said his mother, fretfully, “ when will you learn to behave like a gentleman ? you are rough, and coarser, my dear, than you were before you went abroad ; if the army polished you, you have rubbed the gloss away in your New Zealand rambles. So handsome as you are, so well born on

both sides, and yet with no natural refinement. How is it, Alick?"

Alick burst into a good tempered laugh; he looked very handsome when he laughed, his teeth were so beautiful, his hazel eyes were so bright, his laugh itself was so pleasant in sound.

When he had done he turned to his mother, took her fine small hand in his broad white palm, and answered thus:—

"Upon my word, I don't know, I have a gentleman's instincts, I hope, and believe; but somehow I am not cut out for a West End Man. I'm not a Ladies' Man—I should never figure at Almack's, I'm naturally rough. I'm more at home in Toppleton's bar, than I should be at a ball in Grosvenor Square; I'm half afraid of fine ladies' besides. I'm a sad fellow, mother. What's the row about?"

"Now," returned Mrs. Clyde, in a tone of deep disgust, "where *do* you pick up such expressions, Alick?"

"The deuce knows," said Alick, thrusting his bright, curly hair off his forehead, and letting his mother's hand drop. "Perhaps from the sailor fellows coming home from New Zealand. No, it's not like a sailor's speech, it's more like a Brummagem swell's remark."

"Alick, Alick! you grow worse and worse. You do it to vex me, Alick."

Mrs. Clyde's large black eyes were full of tears, and her voice trembled; then Alick's heart was touched; he kissed his mother, and went and stood with his back to the fire, with his hands crossed behind him.

"Mother, you are not well to-night."

"I have reason, my child, to be sick and sorry both. I have bad news for you, Alick!"

"And bad news," said Alick, "never loses time in getting to one. What is it, pray?"

"Alick, Voltaire says—'*Le mal a des ailes; Le bien va à pas de tortue.*'"

"Never mind Voltaire, he has nothing to

do with me. What is your terrible news? Who's dead? as the schoolboys say."

Then Mrs. Clyde told her son of the remorseless Jarvis, and of the iron man of Steel Street; of other debts which weighed her down—of having left her diamonds in pawn in London, in order to raise the eight hundred pounds, which were found useless in staving off the Gold Digger, and the Apple Gatherer aforesaid, and she wound up by imploring her son to go over, without delay, to the Crofton's, at Oakley, where Miss Broadstairs, the heiress, was visiting, to ingratiate himself with that fair lady, and to propose to her as soon as possible.

"It is the only thing to save us, Alick."

Alick flushed, and then grew white, while his mother spoke; he had never thought seriously for ten minutes before in his life, and to have his thoughtless career of pleasure and extravagance cut suddenly short, was something quite appalling to him.

"Why, good Heavens, mother! but we

have a lawyer, too. Why could not you have sent old Forbes down to Fossett? Forbes would get us money."

"Alas! no, child, you know nothing about it. Forbes lives in London."

"But he might have written to Fossett, or Jarvis, or whatever his name is."

"Written, why what a boy you talk like, Alick; this mortgaging has been going on for years. Forbes himself, our own lawyer, says the estate is not worth one farthing more than the sixty thousand pounds we owe to Jarvis—then there is interest, and other debts beside, and not a shred of security to give beyond our plate and furniture, my ornaments, and our horses and carriages."

"Mother, I shall shoot myself."

And Alick looked ill and wild, as he turned his face towards his mother.

"My boy, it is all in your own power. Miss Broadstairs has thirty thousand pounds down the day she marries, and more at her



uncle's death. Your sister is visiting under the same roof. No girl can resist you, if you only try to please her. Go, my boy, and prosper; remember you will be ruined, Alick, if something is not done."

Alick sighed heavily.

"Poor little Rose Toppleton!" he said, softly.

"What!" said Mrs. Clyde sharply, raising herself on her elbow, and her thin throat and dark face became scarlet with excitement, "you don't mean—you dare not mean, sir, that you have the least regard for that creature, that—"

"Hush, hush if you please," said Alick, who was still white and wild looking, "don't speak a word against that girl, she is as superior to me, mother—" he added in a hurry, and turning towards Mrs. Clyde—"Sometimes a great change passes over a man in five minutes. Sometimes a great event, some overwhelming circumstance

comes, and changes the whole current of one's being. I almost fancy such a change has passed over me since I entered this room. I see myself a thoughtless, careless spendthrift, with nothing but my shallow-brained self to offer to a girl, whose fortune is to save me from ruin, a girl I don't love either mother, it's horrible."

"You don't love? you have never seen her, they say she is pretty Alick."

"Pretty." Alick stood up again, and leaned against the mantel piece; he was in that state of mind which renders it impossible to remain still for five minutes together.

"They say she is. Mrs. Hardinge, who is a great authority in these matters, assured me that Miss Broadstairs looked charming in her stall at the Crystal Palace last Spring; she is a blonde something in Julia's style, don't you admire blondes?"

"No," said Alick rudely, "I don't, I hate them."

"At this moment, perhaps, because you are vexed, but whether you admire her or not, remember thirty thousand pounds are not to be gathered on the hedges."

"I suppose not," said Alick bitterly, "I suppose the hedges hereabouts don't bear such golden blossoms; those who won't work must go without, and I can't work, I've not been used to it. Clyde Chase! mother. Is this vile Jarvis, this low digger to uproot us, to take away this old place from me, from my father; will the law allow him?"

"The law will help him, Alick."

"Then I will shoot him, as true as—"

And Alick extended his clenched fist, his eyes flashed, his face quite changed its expression, and he prepared to swear a fierce oath.

"Hush!" said his mother, waving her hand towards him, "you terrify me, you make me ill, you shatter my nerves. Don't excite yourself, dear; sit down and talk reasonably."

And Alick, who ever owned his mother's sway sat down, but the unspoken oath still lingered at the door of his lips.

"If you were to shoot the Digger, you would be hanged; if you would marry Miss Broadstairs, you could pay the Digger the greater part of his mortgage, and Clyde Chase would still be yours. Is it not better to marry the Heiress than to shoot the Digger?"

"Wiser and safer no doubt, but marvelously less in accordance with my inclinations at this moment, than the latter alternative."

"Don't talk nonsense, Alick. *Will* you ride over to Oakley to-morrow morning? and tell Mrs. Crofton you have come for Julia, then you will be asked to remain a few days, and all will be right."

"And if the girl refuses me. Why, mother I shall feel inclined to box her ears, it will make me feel so low, and mercenary."

"Don't do that," said Mrs. Clyde smiling faintly, "but she will not refuse you," and

the mother looked up fondly at the handsome son. "She will not refuse you, Alick."

"Is her money in her own power?"

"Completely. Nobody could say her nay, if she chose to marry a sweep."

"Perhaps her taste lies that way," said Alick with a grim return of humour, "in that case it's a pity I'm not a sweep."

"Oh, Alick, how you do chatter my boy, do give me an answer; will you go to Oakley to-morrow?"

"To night if you like."

"Will you go to-morrow?"

"Thirty thousand down clear," said Alick, "no debts, nothing but the lady, and the bank notes to take to?"

"Nothing else."

"No relations."

"Only therich old bed-ridden Uncle."

"Hump," said Alick moodily, "well, mother, yes, I think I'll go; it wants some cheek though."

"Some what?" said Mrs. Clyde, with a look of dismay.

"Some cheek."

"What do you mean?"

"Some brass."

"Slang again," said Mrs. Clyde, with a sigh, "and therefore incomprehensible to me."

"Good night now, mother," said Alick, "I must go and soothe my ruffled feelings and hide my diminished head under a cloud of tobacco. I shall call Jack, and make him smoke with me until he can't stand," and Alick went out of the room.

\* \* \* \*

Oakley stands ten miles from Clyde Chase, deep among woods and meadows, a place new, and fine, and wealthy. Mr. Crofton's father had realized an immense fortune in trade; the present Mr. Crofton was a gentleman by education, and Mrs. Crofton was a lady of good family, and so the Clydes visited them, and

patronized them when they were down in the country. The Croftons contented themselves with visiting in their own county, and seldom went to London; they were hospitable, jolly people, their dinners and wine were excellent; their sons were three, the eldest a keen sportsman, great smoker, small reader, and first-rate boxer, stood six feet three without his shoes. He had bold bright blue eyes, a white and red complexion, a manly nature, and a kind heart. His name was Harry, and as he is the only son of the house of Crofton with which this history has aught to do, the others not being at home at the time we write of, it is not necessary to allude to them more particularly.

“Hallo, Alick!” cried Harry Crofton, when Alick, riding his father’s best hunter, appeared in sight of the stables, about one o’clock of the bright winter’s day, “it’s really you, is it?”

“Do you know me then, Harry?” said

Alick, springing off his horse and grasping the other's hand.

"To be sure, I could swear to your sit on horseback anywhere ; besides, I knew you had returned to the Chase. Come in, man, our people will be charmed to see you."

So Alick was ushered into a very comfortable dining-room, where "our people" were engaged in partaking of a substantial luncheon, and our people rose in a body to bid the young heir of Clyde Chase welcome. The young heir, had they but known it, of debt, difficulty, and poverty.

Now there was something vastly winning in Alick Clyde's off-hand, careless effrontery, as it was untinctured by self-importance, and with a manner, which though brimfull of fun and mischief, was yet free from a trait of what could consistently be called vulgarity, because it was void of pretence ; and thus, though he was unpolished to roughness, he was still pleasing.



On this particular day of the Christmas week, however, when he entered the cheerful presence of the Croftons, who had known him from a boy, Alick's manner was timid, shy, and awkward; he was a bad actor, he felt thoroughly uncomfortable, and he scarcely glanced once in the direction of the fair Miss Broadstairs. He sat down and eat cold tongue and chine and wished himself away, followed up his chine with a mince pie, and resolved not to ask Miss Broadstairs to become Mrs. Clyde; followed up his mince pie with a draught of ale from a silver flagon, forced upon him by hearty Harry Crofton, and then fixed his eyes on the heiress and looked well at her.

She sat right opposite him, she was tall and elegant, with plump pink cheeks, a quantity of blond hair falling on her shoulders, and very near-sighted-looking light blue eyes. She wore a rich gold chain with an eye glass attached to it, and when she found Alick's

glance directed towards her, she actually put her glass and returned the scrutiny in the coolest manner possible, whereupon Alick lowered his bright daring eyes and felt his face grow hot; and the heiress, addressing him in the prettiest lisping tone in the world, begged him to help her to a custard; and of course he was forced to obey, although he would much rather have slapped her hard on her inane, insipid, pretty pink and white face, for he felt that she was quizzing him a little, and he began to hate her.

How women can insult us if they choose, and with impunity too! It is very provoking sometimes to be obliged to put up with some fair one's pretty impertinence, reader, is it not? Don't you pity Alick? and where was Miss Julia Clyde all this time? Alick had seen her six weeks before in London, and so he was not called upon to make any violent show of fraternal affection.

Miss Julia was really pretty, much younger

than the heiress, only seventeen, a lovely blonde with bright hazle eyes and "a most finished manner," as the country ladies said. She was much given to dressing and attitudinising; she was most thoroughly impressed with the value of her own charms, and really was the vainest girl alive, Alick roundly declared, and I think he was right; her pretty mouth always wore a simper, and every action said quite plainly, "come, admire me," and people did admire her too. Girls of course were jealous, but men thought her an angel.

She had not the least objection to the attentions of brawny Harry Crofton; he was heir to more acres than would have doubled the value of Clyde Chase, and Miss Julia was fully alive to that fact, and so was Mrs. Clyde when she let her fair child go to visit the Croftons.

And now, reader, you see that Miss Julia was beginning to bow down to the golden image

betimes, and quite willingly too; she spread out her spotless skirts, and made the most graceful obeisance to Mammon, that the most fashionable dancing master could require. Alick, too, is thinking, seriously, of bending his handsome, stubborn head to the same idol. He finds it goes against his grain, though poor Alick, eat another mince pie, if it's only just for luck, and look again at the heiress; she squints a little, by jove, and I almost think that some of those white front teeth are false; she must have fallen down, and knocked them out—twenty-three, yes, not more than that, certainly, and a splendid complexion—thirty thousand pounds down, and no relations to consult. Hurrah! Alick, my lad, you're no fool if you get her. Why not try? So Alick eat an apricot tart, and then went into the billiard room, and had a game with Harry Crofton. But that could not last for ever, you know, no more could the rides, and

the skating, and the snipe shooting, the boxing with Harry, in his sanctum, where gloves, and foils, and pictures of the right honourable Tom Sayers, in various stages of his career, adorned the walls. No, none of these things, dear to the heart of Alick Clyde, could last for ever, and the evening of each day brought the inevitable after dinner hour, when the ladies sang duetts in the drawing-room, when good Mrs. Crofton, who was not strong, dozed upon the couch, when Mr. Crofton talked politics with some other gentlemen of his age, and standing, who generally dropped in of an evening, and when it devolved on the two manly youths, Harry and Alick, to play the agreeable to the ladies.

Not that Alick would have minded this a bit, had it not been for the awful weight Miss Broadstairs with her light half-shut blue eyes, and smooth pink cheeks, was on his mind. He tried to please her, he worked hard, he turned over the leaves of her music, he praised

her singing. She sang mostly German songs ; he waited for her to speak, and applauded all she said. She took his attentions coolly, and as a thing of course. She was a very cool young lady, perfectly self possessed. Alick dreaded her more than he dared to own to himself ; the amount of brass and cheek he possessed he found totally insufficient for his purpose, he made no confidant of any body ; he did not even drop his cousin Jack a line, and thus three days rolled away and Alick had bagged a quantity of snipe, and had splendid boxing matches with young Crofton, had won five guineas of the same young gentleman at billiards, had smoked an unlimited quantity of cigars, had dined, and drank, and dressed, and joked, but had not made his offer to Miss Broadstairs.

At last he felt that it must be done, and he rose on the fourth morning resolved to do it. Pale with resolve, he muttered to himself, as he was drying his face, after washing, in front of a large cheval glass, " I'm not a bad

looking fellow! I wish I had not sold out of the army, perhaps she has a weakness for epaulettes. Any how, here goes;" and now out of respect for our lady readers, we will not intrude any longer in Alick's chamber, but leave him to perform his toilette in peace.

Two hours later, when the breakfast was over, and the two ladies were engaged in some mysterious kind of wool work, Alick stepped into the drawing room, and took his place with an air of stern determination, and with a false, miserable smile on his lips, by the side of Miss Broadstairs, on the sofa.

"Julia," said he, in a thick, tremulous tone, "can't you give us one of your lively French songs, to put us in spirits, this morning?"

Now pretty Julia had begun to surmise where the land lay, and like a sweet obliging little soul, as she was, she made a polite excuse, and quitted the room, which was infinitely better than any French song she could have sung; and now was the time.

Has any gentleman ever felt how extremely

difficult it is to spell "opportunity," when the time arrives?

"It's likely to thaw," observed Miss Broadstairs, softly, she always spoke softly, putting two shades of green wool very close to her eyes, and then selecting one and threading her needle.

"Yes," said Alick, in a low, timid tone; then he cleared his voice and began, unconsciously, to roll up the splendid anti-maccassar, which lay on the cushion.

"Yes, Miss Broadstairs."

Miss Broadstairs paused in the putting through of her needle.

"Yes, Mr. Clyde."

Alick had by this time made the anti-maccassar into a species of dumpling, and he was no longer pale with resolve, but flushed and shame-faced looking. It had to be done, you see, like taking a pill, or submitting to have a tooth extracted, or any other disagreeable thing, which is after all, over in a



moment. Does it not want more pluck, reader, to sit down, and quietly permit Mr. Crackjaw to put his cold steel instrument inside your mouth, when you know well his fell intent is to tear out a living member by the roots, than it does to raise your hunter over a stone wall, a deep ditch, and a five barred gate at a steeple chase? Of course it does. Well, and so Alick Clyde has got thus far, he has made the anti-maccassar into a respectably shaped dumpling; he has got rid of his sister, and he has said "Miss Broadstairs," and the cool heiress has answered "Yes, Mr. Clyde." Now for it—out with it—Go it, Alick, my boy; and Alick did go to it.

"Miss Broadstairs, I love you, passionately, I have been miserable ever since I came here," (the latter part of the sentence was very true,) "and if you do not give me some hope, I shall go mad."

"That would be a pity," said the heiress, with a saucy smile.

"Do not be cruel, do not spurn me," said Alick, squeezing his dumpling hard, and turning to Miss Broadstairs.

"My heart is breaking." There was real agony in poor Alick's tone, there were real tears in his eyes; he was thinking of Clyde Chase, of Jarvis, and the imperturbable Mr. Fossett, of the firm of Fossett and Dunker, Steel Street—he almost looked upon Miss Broadstairs as the fair haired angel who was to ward off these harpies, from his hearth stone.

"Do not spurn me," said Alick.

"I have received so many declarations of this sort, sir," said the heiress, "that I am quite used to them; they don't affect me in the least. *Honest* love, Mr. Clyde, is a thing to be valued, and prized above rubies; but unfortunately I am an orphan, and I have thirty thousand pounds."

"Madam!" exclaimed Alick, passionately.

"When you first came here," continued

the heiress, coldly, "I read your intentions, your motives, plainly. I have had much experience, unfortunately, in these matters. I have taken no pains to please you, and I am not a particularly charming girl. You are not a bit charmed with me, sir. Let me add that Mr. Fossett, of Steel Street, is my guardian and solicitor, and that when a few weeks since I was laughing bitterly with him over my numerous offers, my mercenary lovers, your name happened to transpire. I forget how, but I know that the state of your affairs is not flourishing, and perhaps my poor thirty thousand pounds would have helped to patch up your fortunes. Excuse me, I do not wish to insult you, but these mean, mercenary, selfish pretences, these base attempts to take my gold, and give me cold false love in return, me, a poor orphan, with naturally warm affections, and loving nature, rouse my temper, make me savage, there—" she was quite in a passion. Alick was not angry with her :

mortified to the core, he still had generosity enough to feel for and appreciate the honest indignation of the heiress, he threw his dumpling into a corner, sprang to his feet, and stood facing the fire.

"Miss Broadstairs, you are right, say all that over again, that you have been saying: I deserve it, by George! but I am ruined, Miss Broadstairs, our old place is going from us; you would pity me if you knew all."

"No, no," said the girl hotly, "You are a man and you might work, and win back your estate; better far, nobler far, than to deceive, entrap, sell yourself to a lie. No, I don't forgive you, I never forgive one of my mercenary suitors," and she walked out of the room and left him standing by the fire-place; and this was what came of Alick Clyde's wooing.

CHAPTER XV.

JARVIS.

THE thaw which the heiress had predicted did not come, that day the frost returned and bound the earth in its fetters, the heavens gathered blackness, and the light-feathery snow fell fast and thick, on field and hedge row, on wood and orchard, overlaying the thatched cottage roofs with its pure whiteness, clothing the bare limbs of the trees with its cold beauty, decking up the whole far landscape in white, as for a bridal. Posts were slow in those wintry days, railway trains

crept slowly along the lines, and sometimes two night's letters were not delivered till the morning. Ashton, with its quiet street, its few shops, its Town Hall, its Cross Keys, its County Bank—Ashton lay hushed beneath its wintry covering.

Mr. Middleton entered the parlour of the Cross Keys, and there he found Rose engaged in writing a letter; she glanced up uneasily when he came in: "Go on, Miss Toppleton," he said, "I shall not disturb you," and he gravely drew the *Times* from his pocket. "I shall not interfere with you." Rose went on with her writing, but Middleton did not go on reading; he glanced fondly from time to time at Rose's beautiful, flushed, tearful face—she could not please herself in the composition of her letter, at last she put down her pen and covered her eyes with her hands, then Middleton put down his *Times* and walked up to the table.

"Don't cry," said he, kindly.

"I am not crying," said Rose, bravely, drawing away her hands from her eyes. "I am only puzzled and anxious."

"Don't be puzzled and anxious then."

"How can I help it? It's about this security for fifteen hundred pounds, that I am trying to write to the lawyer, but I don't know how to write to a lawyer."

"I should imagine not; you don't learn such things at the Pensionnats, in the Champs Elysées, or at the Clapham boarding-schools. Who is the lawyer?"

"A Mr. Fossett, of Steel Street, Birmingham."

"Well, and is the money on the security of the bill due to him?"

"No, to a client of his named Jarvis; a very rich Australian gold-digger. He is expected to return daily. He has an enormous mortgage on Clyde Chase, and he also lent money to this farmer Clayton."

"Yes!"

"Mr. Fossett lent it, which is the same thing, on the security of my father's name."

"This Jarvis then, is likely to lose by your father."

"No; I am sure our stock and the goodwill of the inn will sell for enough to clear the debt, but what shall we do afterwards? I am afraid it will kill my father; he won't stir out of his room, he won't speak; it is terrible."

"Rose, is not this life full to the brim of terrible things, terrible trials? How seldom is it we find one who has not some great grief, hidden perhaps, but still there. Do you expect, sweet Rose, to go along a path of roses, 'where the flowers ever blossom, the beams ever shine?'"

"No, I have never trodden such a path since I have passed childhood, nor do I expect to tread it again in this world. God does not will that His creatures should find their Heaven upon earth."



“And yet, Rose, it is a lovable world, is it not? Look at it now, covered with a white robe, clothed in purity; is it not beautiful? Look inside the merry English homes, where the rosy children cluster round the fire, and clamour for their share of Christmas cake and Christmas presents; look at the proud mother, the fond father. Then again, Rose, when the spring, the bright, young spring, is present with us, is it not still more a beautiful world? Have you ever in childhood stood entranced with the full intoxicating sense of loveliness on some May morning, when the hedges were white with hawthorn, and the cowslips, half-hidden in the deep dewy grass, seemed like a mine of golden treasures spread out at your feet, when the sprays of the trees met over your head, letting in pictures of the sky through their green frames, pictures of blue ether, with here and there a white cloud, like an angel’s wing floating over it? At such a moment, in such a scene, I have wept glad

tears, drawn from my very heart by the deep, solemn sense of earth's beauty. It is a loveable world, Rose, after all."

"You have thought my very thoughts," said Rose.

Middleton smiled.

"Aye, when I was young; but since then I have struggled for bread, I have grappled with poverty, I have had the world against me; I have bargained, and bought, and sold; I have fought for my life with men worse than wild beasts; I have lived for months together on what I could bring down with my gun, I have swam in the sea with a hungry shark at my heels, and I have been left for dead (more lately that) among the slain after a great battle. I am world-hardened now, Rose."

"I think not."

"Do you? Well, let us talk now of this terrible Jarvis. Shall I go and speak to this man, this lawyer?"

"Oh, if you would!"

“ But what must I say to him ? ”

“ Will you not give me some advice yourself? what had we better say to him ?

“ We? ‘ *Ils commencent de dire nous.* ’ ”

How often has that been quoted, I wonder; and Middleton—yes, the colour deepened on his bronzed cheek, and he turned away his head.

“ You know, if you will marry me, I will work to support you, Rose, and your father shall never want.”

“ You will work ; but, Mr. Middleton, my father should work too. Can’t you understand that it is leaving the inn that will break his heart ? ”

“ I understand ; but leaving the inn, Rose, should not break your heart ; you are not fitted for an inn.”

“ It is, nevertheless, the station to which it has pleased God to call me.”

“ Not so ; the Almighty Disposer of All has gifted you with a temperament, and talents,

and tastes which render the coarse, common, every-day, vulgar life of the Cross Keys distasteful to you, Rose."

"True, but it is, nevertheless, my duty to remain and assist my parents, even though the kind of life for which they are fitted, and to which I was born, be disagreeable to me."

"You have a strong sense of duty, Rose."

"I wish I had—but we are wandering from the subject."

"No; I should like my answer now; will you marry me?"

"How straightforward you are, Mr. Middleton."

"Will you not be so, too, and answer, 'Yes,' or 'No?'"

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"It would take a long time to answer that."

"Begin, then, at once; I am not pressed for time."

"Why, Mr. Middleton, you are a complete

stranger to me; and yet, I will confess, my sympathies, my soul, if I may so express it, seem more drawn towards you, than they have ever been towards anybody before, and yet I have loved, wildly."

"Hah!"

Middleton's eye flashed, and his tone was full of the bitterness of jealousy.

"Why it is," Rose went on calmly, "that I feel such confidence in you, in your honour, in your fine, generous feelings, I know not. If it be that I am weak and credulous, and you merely deceitful, why then so much the worse for me; if, on the other hand, it is that mysterious linking of soul with soul, that finding of a second self which dreamers and poets speak of; if you be really the man I take you for, and believe you to be, why then so much the better and the happier for me, and I would be your true *wife*, with my whole heart."

"God bless you! but who have you loved, Rose?"

"Alick Clyde."

"And you don't love him now?"

"No; I have found my idol clay. Alick Clyde has no inner being, no capacities for loving. I leaned upon a staff, and it pierced my hand."

"Will you lean on this strong arm for life? it shall shield you from all dangers, it shall support you in all afflictions as honestly, as tenderly, as fondly, as an arm of flesh ever has done yet, in this weary world."

"A little more time for thought," pleaded Rose.

"Well, on New Year's day, then, you must really give me, Yes, or No, and I intend to ask before several people too, and I will tell you a little more of my antecedents then. Here comes Johnnie to call us to dinner, that inevitable dining, Rose, that Mr. Owen Meredith talks about."



Care sat behind the stalwart young horseman who dashed recklessly into the stable yard of Clyde Chase, on the afternoon of the same day on which the heiress had so insultingly refused to become Mrs. Alexander Clyde. The horseman, of course, reader, is Alick himself. Alick, the humbled, the wretched, the enraged—he springs from his horse, calls imperiously to the groom, enters the house the back way, and finds the door of his mother's room, and his mother is under the adroit hands of Mademoiselle Christine; but Alick stalks in gloomily, fiding boots and all, and turns his angry eyes full upon his mother.

She saw it all at a glance.

“Christine, *laissez moi pour le present.*”

“*Bien, madame,*” and Christine tripped away.

“Well,” said Mrs. Clyde sharply, when she was sure the girl was out of hearing.

“Well!” echoed Alick savagely, and fling-

ing himself into a chair; "it's anything but well!"

"She has refused you."

"With scorn, with contempt; she is a sharp-witted wench—she saw through me at once—coolly told me I wanted her thirty thousand pounds to patch up my own fortunes. Confusion seize it all!"

But Alick used a stronger term.

"Do not swear, Alick, it is a low habit."

"What do I care about that; I say it again—confusion seize it all!"

And again, reader, I am under the necessity of informing you that Alick used a much stronger word than I have deemed it advisable to write down here.

"You managed badly I must say, to let the girl fancy you came after her money," said Mrs. Clyde bitterly.

"Did I? what if I inform you, that when in my shame, I made a confidant of Harry Crofton, he turned round full of astonishment



to find that I had not known that he and Jenny Broadstairs have been engaged this twelvemonths, and are to be married in the spring. Hal was quite up about it, so sorry, and all that, so kind, and bothering, and interfering. Oh, confound everything and everybody! I'll emigrate to Australia! I'll change my name! I'll shoot myself!"

And Alick buried his face in his hands.

"The only thing to be done," said Mrs. Clyde, "is to appeal to this Jarvis himself. A low vulgar man may perhaps be impressed with our superior intelligence, our good blood, our claims of long descent; eh, Alick?"

"If you like to do the scraping and begging you may, I would rather knock the rascal's brains out."

"You are in a murderous mood, child; take off your boots, and let us have dinner, you will be better after."

"There is somebody coming up the stairs," said Alick, and the next moment a tap

sounded on the door. Alick opened it and took a note from the hands of the servant. It was a lawyer's letter with a blue envelope, and a sprawling hand writing, directed "Leolf Clyde, Esq., Clyde Chase, of —shire."

"Master is in Birmingham," said the footman, "so I've brought the letter for Missus."

Alick gave it to his mother; she opened it, read it, and grew pale, then handed it to Alick.

"SIR,

"My client, Mr. Jarvis, is still resolved to proceed to the utmost length the law will permit, for the recovery of the £60,000 due, with interest, to him, as the mortgage money on Clyde Chase; he hopes you will see the absolute necessity of making some arrangement immediately. He is at present staying at Ashton, at the 'Cross Keys,' and he has written to request me to inform you that he will either wait upon you himself, at

Clyde Chase, or that he shall be happy to receive a visit from you at his lodgings, should you deem it advisable to honour him so far. In either case, as he appears anxious for a personal interview, it would perhaps be advisable to grant him one.

“We are, Sirs,

“Respectfully yours,

“FOSSETT, DUNKER, & Co.”

“Leolf Clyde, Esq.”

“Just what I was saying,” said Mrs. Clyde.

“An Australian gold digger,” said Alick, “I do believe it’s that grey beard, that old monster with the carpet bag, that is stopping at Toppletons’, but he said his name was Middleton; still I believe it’s the same fellow.”

“What kind of a person?” asked Mrs. Clyde.

“A rude, interfering, prying, preaching, old beast,” said Alick, hotly, “by heavens, if I

go there, I'll make him remember it. I'd pitch into him, if he were Tom Sayers himself. Oh! yes, he shall have an interview granted him; an interview with me."

And Alick stood up, and looked perfectly savage. •

"Sit down, Alick!"

"When I've had my dinner, I intend to pay this gentleman a visit, a very polite visit, mother."

"I shall come with you," said Mrs. Clyde.

"Do, if you like, I warn you—you won't find me a very tractable child; I mean to pitch into this Jarvis, as sure as the sun will set to-night!"

"Have you been drinking, Alick?"

"No," said Alick, sharply, and loudly, "I've not."

And the enraged youth, flung out of the room in most undutiful fashion.

His mother had never seen him so excited before. They were a hot blooded race, those Clydes.

Mrs. Clyde bethought her of one, wilful, passionate, and stalwart, as Alick himself, but with a far more tender soul, a far superior mind; he shot, and rode, and fenced, and swam, and boxed as well, or better, than Alick himself, but he did these things to show he could, and to escape the charge of effeminacy, which his musing, studious habits might have brought against him. Leolf, her strippling step-son, with his yellow hair, and fair face, and tall, ungainly form. Leolf, the heir to broad Clyde Chase, when Clyde Chase was free, and its green acres were an heirloom she coveted desperately for her own curly haired cherub Alick; how she had hated the heir, what small persecutions she had subjected him too, working on his morbid sensitive temperament, pitilessly mocking his terrible shyness, hinting to her fine friends that the lad was half crazed. She remembered now, how one day he had turned round and cursed her with all the hot blood of the

proud Clyde's mantling on his young cheek. She had never seen him since, he had run away from Eton, and nothing had been heard until he had written to tell his father that he had shipped as a common sailor on board the Columbine merchantman.

Afterwards had come the dreadful news of the shipwreck of the Columbine, of its utter loss, of the names of the crew and passengers, and amongst them, amongst the names of the drowned, was that of Leolf Clyde, aged twenty-one, and she had felt glad (God forgive her!) She had felt glad her pretty Alick was then the heir; how handsome the boy had looked in his suit of crape, and now, alas!—alas! extravagance and folly had done their work, had wrested the prize from his grasp; her gallant Alick, with his fierce Clyde spirit, was a beggar, and the honours of his ancestral home were to be poured out at the feet of a low gold digger, called Jarvis!

## CHAPTER XVI.

YES, OR NO.

THE Toppletons had finished tea; the little ones were in bed; the customers were flocking in. Rose and her mother were busy; old Middleton sat smoking in the corner; Timms the rich, and Banks the pompous, were holding a little desultory discourse; Johnnie stood by, attentive to every word.

“A ball,” said Mr. Banks, stirring his whiskey, and leaning his elbow on his knee; “a ball is not got up here in proper style. At Litchfield, where I was located before I

came here, we used to charge four guineas a ticket, and we admitted none but the real nobs of the place."

"Did you take the tickets at the door?" asked Middleton, suddenly and rudely, appealing to Banks.

Middleton, who had been noted among the guests at the Cross Keys for his strange taciturnity; Middleton, who had given it out publicly, that he was a poor man, seeking employment as clerk or overseer; Middleton, the roughly clad, the roughly spoken, was not worthy of a reply from Banks the pompous, Banks the fat, the sleek, the rosy, the husband of the daughter of the late Christopher Rickworth, Esq., of Penton, in the Glade Penton, in the glade where the present Christopher Rickworth abode, at the time being, a country gentleman, and own brother to the wife of Banks; so, with the coldest contempt, and the most enviable phlegm possible, Mr. Banks drank half of his whiskey,



and put the tumbler down as though he had not heard Middleton.

"You are too grand to answer my question," said old Middleton, "and perhaps I had no right to ask it. I don't want to insult you, Mr. Banks. Your touch on the organ is sublime. I am a judge, too; I have been on the continent, and I have heard superb music; besides, I adore sweet sounds. You play poetically, Mr. Banks."

"Thank you," said Banks, half scornfully.

"But pursued Middleton, it would be an insult to my own sagacity Mr. Banks, to let you suppose that I believe your four guinea ball ticket story; in the first place there was never such a ball given in a provincial town, in the second place the organist would not be admitted, supposing there were such a ball. I don't believe your story, sir."

"You have been drinking," said the great Banks loftily.

"Yes, tea, on mine honour, Mr. Banks,

nothing more potent ; I appeal to Mrs. Toppleton, to bear me out in my assertion, that I am the most temperate individual she has ever had the good fortune to entertain in the Cross Keys, as a guest. Am I not, Mrs. Toppleton ?”

Mrs. Toppleton, who had not heard the little war of words, turned her head, and asked, “ what Mr. Middleton meant ?”

“ Am I not a miracle of sobriety, Mrs. Toppleton ?”

“ What, sir ?”

“ Am I not a pattern of propriety, Mrs. Toppleton ?”

“ You are as bad to night, Mr. Middleton, as young Mr. Clyde, with your long words and grave face ; you are making fun.”

“ No, just intimate to this gentleman the fact that I am all but a teetotaller.”

“ That he is,” said Mrs. Toppleton, “ it’s seldom Mr. Middleton touches a drop of ale ; why, she added, facing about, who said as you wasn’t ?”

"Now you see, Mr. Banks," said Middleton gravely, "that I am not to be accused of being in a state of—where shall I find a term—when I expressly state that my principles will not allow me to leave you under the impression that I credit your four guinea ball ticket story—it may be a pretty story, or it may not, that I leave to the tastes of others to decide, but it is not a true one."

"You are a—" began Banks, furiously.

"Hush, don't call naughty names," interrupted Middleton, still with a face of good tempered, grave drollery. "I'll tell you what I am, I'm a rude fellow with no taste, and no just appreciation of the merits of great and important people like yourself for instance; indeed I ought to ask your forgiveness; think how I have been tossed about the world, my life amongst sailors and emigrants; and now I could tell you some tales that would surprise you—true ones too, but you see you might take leave to doubt my assertions, and so I had better be silent. You, Mr. Banks,

who have lived all your life among genteel people; you, who come from London; you, who are so superior to the rest of mankind generally, you ought to have a little pity for the ignorance of a rough old fellow like myself; and now I'll go away for a bit," and Middleton went out of the bar without a smile on his lip, leaving the organist busily employed in attempting to smooth the ruffled plumes of his self importance, in which he very soon succeeded.

Middleton walked up and down outside the house, smoking his cigar; and looking at the snow. Presently there came the rattle of the wheels of a phaeton over the snow, and the phaeton stopped at the 'Cross Keys.' It was driven by a well-coated coachman, and a gentleman sat beside him, who jumped out of the vehicle, and turned to give orders to his servant.

"Take the horse round; I will sleep here to-night," and then the gentleman perceived Mr. Middleton.

"Oh ! you is it, Mr. Jarvis?" and they shook hands. "Have you seen any of the Clydes?"

"No," said Jarvis, for we will give the rich gold digger his true name now. "Have you written?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Fossett, "they would get the letter this afternoon."

"And did you say I wanted a personal interview?"

"Yes; here, or at the Chase. I said just what you told me, that if Clyde would honour you by a visit here, or would receive you at his house, it was the same thing to you."

"Well, I have seen nothing of them, Mr. Fossett, but I am obliged to you for coming; you can have a good bed here, and if they do not take any notice we will call there to-morrow together."

"I am very much afraid," said Mr. Fossett, "that you will gain nothing after all by a personal interview. It is cold," and Mr. Fossett stamped his legal feet on the pavement.

"Come in," said Jarvis, and they went in.

Mr. Fossett warmed himself and drank some mulled port wine by the fire in the bar, while Ann, by Jarvis's orders, lighted a fire in the little parlour, and thither, when it was ready, they adjourned, and they spread out law papers upon the table, and called for pen and ink, and became very busy, and the long winter night had not much more than set in, for the town clock of Ashton sounded eight, when there rolled up to the 'Cross Keys' a close carriage, from which issued Alexander Clyde, and he stalked majestically into the house; he took no notice of Rose knitting in her corner, of rosy Banks, or good-tempered Ruskin, or respectable Timms; his face was gloomy, when he asked Mrs. Toppleton if she had among her lodgers a man called Jarvis.

Mrs. Toppleton looked frightened at the sound of the dreaded name.

"No, Mr. Clyde, he is not here."

"Is Middleton here, the old grey-haired man?"

"Yes, he's in the parlour, very busy with a gentleman, a lawyer, I think."

"Tell him Mr. Alexander Clyde wishes to speak to him."

"Rose," said Mrs. Toppleton, "go and tap at the door, ask pardon, you know."

Mrs. Toppleton still thought herself capable of instructing poor Rose in the art of politeness.

Rose went. At first her gentle summons was not heard, for the two men were talking earnestly, but on repeating it, Mr. Fossett's legal ears caught the sound, and that gentleman arose and opened the door, and although Rose did not know him, she read unconsciously, "Fossett and Dunker, Solicitors, Steel Street," in the bright blue, hard-looking eyes, yellow whiskers, diamond ring, and long black coat of Mr. Fossett; his black trousers, and well-fitting leather boots, repeated the same announcement. Fossett and Dunker said the whiskers, the shirt front, and the rich ring.

Solicitors, Steel Street, Birmingham, added the nether garments and the glossy boots.

"Mr. Middleton," began Rose.

Mr. Fossett shoke his head.

"Not here."

But Jarvis came at the sound of her voice.

"Yes, he is ; I have called myself Middleton here, Mr. Fossett. What is it, Rose?"

Rose started at the name of Fossett, she looked with awe at the personification of legal exactness.

"Mr. Alexander Clyde asks if he can see Mr. Middleton."

"Certainly, I have business with him, but I want a witness. I want you to oblige me, will you remain in the room?"

"Not necessary," said Mr. Fossett.

"I particularly wish it though," said Jarvis.

"Tell Mr. Clyde I am ready."

Rose went out with her brain in a whirl, there stood Alick in the kitchen, between the parlour and the bar.



"You can go in, Mr. Alick," said Rose.

"Can I; did he send his orders by you?"

"His orders? No. Mr. Clyde you look ill, what is the matter?"

She might well ask, for the handsome lip was quite contorted by the spasm of scornful wrath that curled it, and the handsome face was white with pent-up passion; but Alick did not answer her, he rushed off (while she spoke) to the front door, and went to the carriage, from whence he returned with his mother leaning on his arm.

And now the surprise of the Cross Keys is boundless; the lady of the Chase and her son closeted with old Middleton and a lawyer. Rose also pressed into their service as a witness, for Mr. Fossett came out actually to solicit her presence, and the door is shut and nothing can be known for some time. Speculation and conjecture are busy in the bar; Johnnie wants to go and listen at the door, and while Mrs. Toppleton whisks him off and scolds him

loudly, she is conscious of a strong desire to do the like herself.

Now, reader, come into the little parlour ; you shall know all about it, if you like. By the bright burning fire sits Mrs. Clyde, with her rich veil thrown back, her fur mantle sweeping the ground ; her face is pained and anxious, it is raised pleadingly towards that of Jarvis, who, however, turns resolutely away and talks in muttered tones to Mr. Fossett. These two are still seated at the table strewn with papers, mortgages, bills, and leases. Rose is on the sofa with a troubled face—and what of Alick ? When Mrs. Clyde took her son at his word, and believed his wild braggart assertion that he would go down to Toppleton's and pitch into the "gold digger;" when she believed that Alexander Clyde was really capable of forfeiting his claim to be considered a gentleman, and forgetting that, though beggared, he was still a Clyde, and a Clyde of the Chase, she proved

that she knew scarcely anything of her son's real nature.

His wrath was unutterable, his scorn for the vulgar upstart who was to rob him of his home was intense ; but pride was the dominant feeling, and there he stood in the memorable little parlour, calmly refusing to be seated, with still that spasm of concentrated wrath on his lips, and with a face pale to ghastliness.

"Your father, I suppose, Mr. Clyde is not returned?" said Mr. Fossett, wheeling about in his chair, and turning to Alick. "You will do as well, however. I believe, Mr. Jarvis only wishes to be quite certain, to hear it from your lips, or your father's, that you really have no means whatever of paying up even part of the mortgage. Do I express what you wished to convey?"—(to his client).

"Quite," said Jarvis roughly.

"You perceive then that it is totally useless to expect my client to stay proceedings. You owe a large amount of interest likewise."

"I have never asked that man called Jarvis to stay proceedings once," said Alick Clyde, advancing towards the table, "I would never condescend to ask that man to step aside out of his way were there pestilence in his breath, and though he were stalking straight towards me; were I bound hand and foot, and did I know that by one prayer to *him* I could avert my doom and save my life I would not utter it."

"Alick Clyde, you are mad," said Mrs. Clyde; then appealing to Jarvis, "he is passionate, poor boy, pray don't mind his ravings. We must borrow the money in some way; I shall hear, I think, from Mr. Forbes tomorrow, he is coming down."

"Ah," said Mr. Fossett, "that will be very suitable, very pleasant, I should be very glad to see Mr. Forbes."

"I tell you man," said Alick, "that it is useless to think of Forbes; take the estate, take everything, and take my curse with it, the Heir's curse."

Jarvis turned round slowly, and faced his fierce young foe.

"Don't say those words, don't curse the place."

"I will by—"

"Be silent," roared Jarvis; "I tell you, you pampered popinjay, you that were born forsooth to wealth, and honours, that I am the rightful owner, or shall be soon of Clyde Chase. You despise me, do you? you—you who never did one good or useful thing since you shewed your puny face first to the great world. Ah! but it was a luxurious place for you, from the first, golden days were those of your childhood, obedient menials to do your bidding, pleasures, and toys, and rides, and carriages, eh, and then youth came, buoyant and proud, and lavish, and careless and joyous, and you went abroad, good faith. You wore a scarlet coat, did you? and you called yourself a soldier, ha, ha!"

"I warn you, Mr. Jarvis," said Alick in a

voice hoarse with rage, "I warn you, that you are an old man, and that I will never submit to insult."

"You won't, poor fool; why if you go out in the world without a penny in your pocket, do you think the world will care for your hectoring? I tell you it will insult your every prejudice, it will trample on your proud spirit, and crush your Clyde's nature out of you almost, it will."

Mr. Fossett listened carefully to the fierce speeches of these two passionate men, and he looked well-satisfied so far, that his client had said nothing actionable.

Alexander Clyde folded his arms on his breast, and stood fronting Jarvis, without speaking. He was going to wait and see how far the insults of the other would go; his calmness astonished himself, but it was a deadly calm, and the working of his lip was fearful.

"You scorn me," said Jarvis, "too much

to answer me even ! Oh ! young man, it is only the old, old tale over again. Carry your thoughts back to the time when regal France was rioting in luxury, when the nobles all looked so fine, and smelt so sweet, when the poor died by hundreds for want. There came a time when the tables were turned, out came the spirit of the crushed masses, down went the spirit of the pampered *noblesse*. You now represent a noble of the old *regime* going into poverty and exile. I am a son of the red republic; the world has been my home; I have toiled early and late, I have worked in mines, and dived into the deep, I have hunted wild beasts, and slept whole nights on the bare ground; then I have traded in precious gems, and dug gold out of mines, and at last wealth has poured into me. Wealth gotten by my own right hand, while you have been playing at soldiers, riding fine horses, eating good dinners, drinking good wine, lying in soft beds. Well, I have lent

money to your father, and none of you can pay me this money again. I have set my heart on winning this estate, and the law gives it to me. Is your scorn of me just then, Alick Clyde? Answer like a man. Have I not worked for it?"

"Take it," was all Alick could say, while his face worked with passion.

"With your curse?"

Alick inclined his head in assent, but his tongue refused utterance; his hands and teeth were clenched, and he looked like some savage at bay.

"Oh! not with your curse," broke forth Jarvis, in a tone so pathetically tender, that the little audience started to hear it; "not with your curse; I cursed it once, but you were little then; you have forgotten me, Alick."

Jarvis put his hand upon the grey covering of his head, and tore it away, as well as the bushy false whiskers, and there stood in the



parlour of the Cross Keys, a man of four-and-thirty, but looking much younger; a young man, erect and noble, with his false stoop gone; his profile was fine, and clearly cut as Alick's own, he had fair, sunny hair, and a grand, broad brow.

"You have forgotten me, Alick!"

"What does this mean?" said Alick, "my name is Clyde!"

"And so is mine; I am Leolf, the son of Leolf and Isabel Clyde; but I was not on board the Columbine when she went down. I have changed my name and worked for wealth—I have toiled hard these fifteen years—I, the dreamer, the half-crazed, morbid poet—the scorned sentimentalist. God knows I felt savage, as you felt just now, when first I began to will that I would win a fortune for myself, and leave you in undisturbed possession of my rightful inheritance! Afterwards, writing home, under a false name, to this gentleman, and asking him to obtain me a freehold mort-

gage, as a safe investment for my first savings, I was thunderstruck to find myself offered a hold upon my own estate. I took it—I lent more and more as time went on, at last I became the owner of it all, as I stand now.”

“If your tale is true,” said Alick, “if you are in truth my brother, then I have nothing more to say, but only to thank you for redeeming our old name from dishonour; if you are indeed Leolf Clyde, may you prosper at the Chase more than I have done; but I shall not incommode you with my presence there.”

“You will not! and is this all you have to say to me, Alick, brother? after this long absence; after my toils and dangers; my efforts to save the estate for you?”

“For me!”

“For whom else? not for myself—I love it not. Alas! it never was a home for me. When first I began to grow rich, I may have cherished some revengeful feelings; but, not for long. I have loved you in absence, young

brother. I am not a revengeful Monte Christo, come back to think of my wrongs—rather let me try and imitate the affectionate tenderness of the Canaanite brother. Clyde Chase shall be made irrevocably yours, by the kind help of my legal friend here ; it shall be tied upon you and your heirs for ever ; this was the real reason I summoned him ; and now, Alick hold me off no longer.”

By this time Alick’s passion had melted into a very opposite feeling ; the brothers embraced each other fondly there, in the presence of Mrs. Clyde, Rose, and the chief member of the firm of Steel Street Lawyers.

“ And now, Alick, we will burn the mortgages, and you shall draw on me for twenty thousand pounds. I have amassed three hundred thousand pounds, as well as the sum I paid for Clyde Chase. I am rich at last.”

Mrs. Clyde here thought fit to burst into violent weeping, and to declare that poor dear Leolf had always misunderstood her.

He went to her, and took her hand.

"Be of good cheer, Clyde Chase shall be tied upon your Alick and his heirs for ever."

"And for yourself?" she asked.

"Oh, I have bought a nice place in Hampshire, which I have named Park Columbine, after the vessel that I was supposed to have been drowned in. Alick, come here,—now Mr. Fossett, and you, Miss Rose, you are witnesses of the perfect reconciliation that has taken place this Christmas week between Leolf Clyde and Alexander his brother."

Alick was by this time clasping fondly the hand of the noble brother, whom he only remembered dimly in his far off childhood, but of whom he had always preserved an affectionate recollection. He actually sobbed with emotion.

"Why, Alick, Alick, man, you to be sobbing like a nursery child, for shame!"

But there were large tears in his own great grey eyes as he spoke.

"Rose, come here." Mr. Fossett had with-

drawn, and Rose had been about to follow his example, when Leolf called her to him. "Rose, darling, answer me now; you shall not leave us one moment; never mind Alick, and now answer me, while I tear up this bill for two thousand pounds, with your father's name on it. Yes, or no, Rose?"

"You, Mr. Clyde, the head of your family, I, John Toppleton's daughter, at the 'Cross Keys,' I dare not say yes!"

"Rose, my wealth is the fruit of hard toil, not the idle inheritance of a pampered gentleman; I am after all a 'gold digger,' and have been a trader. I never loved until I saw your sweet bright face in this room; without you life will be desolate, with you it will be full of beauty; you must be mine, Rose, through evil report and good report, until death parts us twain, and, Rose, you must be my wife. What do you answer, yes, or no." He drew her to his heart as he spoke, and the word she whispered low in his ear was, "yes."

## CHAPTER XVII.

### FINALE.

LEOLF CLYDE had come back to the home of his fathers, still in the pride of his strength and in the glory of his manhood. Wealth was his, and power, the blessed power of conferring benefits on all around him.

He stood again on the threshold of "Clyde Chase," the happy owner of all its fair domain, the generous donor of it to his younger brother.

His father's degradation was the one bitter drop in his brimming cup of joy. His father

steeped to the lips in drunkenness, and scarcely capable of welcoming back, as he should have done, this brave son, who had been dead and was alive again; Leolf had great hopes of Alick. Long and seriously the brothers conferred together on the day following the scene in the "Cross Keys," and Leolf told Alick that he had let him suffer the dread, and the shame, and the evil of poverty, that he might have a just horror of it, and learn how cruel a foe it really is, in most cases, to us all.

Mr. Fossett was occupied all the morning in drawing up a deed of settlement, by which "Clyde Chase" was irrevocably settled upon Alexander Clyde, and his heirs, for ever. The imperturbable gentleman manifested no surprise at the turn affairs had taken; I almost think he felt none, nor would he have experienced any, had Leolf turned out to be the Emperor of all the Russias.

"And you have won little Rose Toppleton

away from me under my very eyes," said Alick, half sadly.

"You might have won her had you listed, brother mine, at one time."

"Well," said Alick, sighing, "may you be happy!"

"How can I be otherwise with such a treasure?"

I am much of Leolf's opinion; how could he be otherwise, with such a combination of womanly sweetness, integrity, love, refinement, strength, and gentleness, as Rose Toppleton.

He was happy in the noble home he bore her to, far enough from the Cross Keys and the county where it stood, to avoid that incongruity which must have arisen from the association of its honest owners with the fair and graceful lady of Park Columbine.

Not that Rose forgot her parents, they visited her once or twice in the year; and every Christmas Leolf brought his beautiful wife to spend a week at "Clyde



Chase," and on Christmas day they always dined in the little parlour at the "Cross Keys," and as time crept on, there came a young Clyde or two with them, rosy, and arch, and lovely.

Oh! they were happy, those two kindred spirits with their intense love and admiration for each other, their deep worship of the beautiful, their unselfishness, their charity, their nobleness, their gentleness, their wealth; for had they been struggling with poverty, their energies and capacities for usefulness and happiness, would have been cramped, say what you will, reader.

The poor in the neighbourhood of Park Columbine were happy poor. The tenants of Leolf Clyde, the younger, were happy tenants.

In St. Mark's Church the letters were erased which told that Leolf, son of Leolf and Isabel, "had departed this life."

The Cross Keys was bought by Leolf from

his old friend Timms, and presented as a wedding gift to John Toppleton, by the happy husband of Rose.

If you want to know the reason why queer little Timms had melted into sentiment on the night when Leolf's supposed death was the subject of conversation in the bar, I will tell you.

Long ago, in the little withered rich man's primrose time, before he was a rich little man in his golden time of the teens, he had loved the mother of Leolf, for she was in his own rank, and it was her beauty which had won her a gentleman for a husband.

Leolf Clyde, the elder, did not long survive the return of his son. He went down to his grave an old man, when he should only have been entering into the hale and healthy autumn of a well spent life.

Alick made a generous landlord—not over industrious, very kind, very merry, very much beloved; he married a little sweet, fair, delicate blond, whom he fell in love with at a ball,

and as the phrase goes, he made her a good, kind husband. She had not a penny in the world. Alick had conceived a horror of heiresses.

The Cross Keys still flourishes in Ashton Town ; the church still stands where it did. Poor Mr. Evan is gathered to his fathers, and a talented and Christian minister now stands boldly in the pulpit, and awakens even Johnnie Toppleton, who is grown tall, and is to be a doctor, to a delighted sense of hearing; and still after the blessing has been pronounced, and the mothers, and brothers, and lovers, and children, are flocking out of St. Mark's, still does rosy Banks send forth sweet heaven-born sounds from the notes of the swelling organ, and its melody floats softly, like an incense, down the aisles, and lingers lovingly at the portals.

THE END.

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